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A Reaping

By

E. F. Benson

Author of 'The Climber,' 'Sheaves,' etc.

'Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly. . . .'



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JUNE

JUNE

Of all subjects under or over the sun, there is none perhaps, even including bimetallism, or the lengthy description of golf-links which one has never seen, so utterly below possible zones of interest as that of health. Health, of course, matters quite enormously to the individual, but nobody with good health ever gives two thoughts (far less one word) to the subject. Nobody, in fact, begins to think about health until his own begins to be inferior. But, then, as if that was not bad enough, he at once clubs and belabours his unhappy friends with its inferiority. It becomes to him the one affair of absorbing importance. Emperors may be assassinated, Governments may crumble, it may even be 92 degrees in the shade, but he recks nothing of those colossal things. He ate strawberries yesterday, and has had a bilious headache almost ever since. And the world ceases to revolve round the sun, and the moon is turned to blood, or ashes—I forget which.

But the real invalid, just like the man who enjoys real health, never talks about such matters. It is only to the amateur in disease that they are of the smallest interest. The man who is well never thinks

about his health, and certainly never mentions it; to the man who is really ill some divine sense of irresponsibility is given. He brushes it aside, just as one brushes aside any innate inability; with common courage—how lavishly is that beautiful gift given to whomever really needs it—he makes the best of other things.

These poignant though obvious reflections are the outcome of what occurred this evening. I sat between two friends at dinner, both of them people in whom one's heart rejoices. But one of them is obsessed just now with this devil of health-seeking. The other has long ago given up the notion of seeking for health at all, for it is not for her. She faces incurable disease with gaiety. So I have to record two conversations, the worse first.

'Oh, I always have ten minutes' deep-breathing every morning. It is the only way I can get enough air. You have to lie on your back, you know, and stop one nostril with your finger, while you breathe in slowly through the other; and you should do it near an open window. There is no fear of catching cold, or if you do I can send you a wonderful prescription. . . . Then you breathe out through the other nostril. I wish you would try it; it makes the whole difference. No, thanks, caviare is poison to me!'

'Well, so is arsenic to me,' I said. 'But why say so?'

(It did not sound quite so brusque as it looks when written down, and native modesty prevents my explaining how abjectly patient I had been up till then.)

Then there came the reshifting of conversation, and we started again, with change of partners.

'I do hope you will come to see us again in August,' said the quiet, pleasant voice. 'I shall go up to Scotland at the end of the month. Your beloved river should be in order: there has been heaps of rain.'

But I could not help asking another question.

'Ah, then they let you go there?' I said.

She laughed gently.

'No, that is just what they don't do,' she said. 'But I am going. What does it matter if one hastens it by a few weeks? I am going to shorten it probably by a few weeks, but instead of having six tiresome months on board a yacht, I am going to have rather fewer months among all the things I love. Oh, Dick quite agrees with me. Do let's talk about something more interesting. Did you hear "Tristan" the other night? No? Richter conducted. He is such a splendid Isolde! There is no one to approach him!'

There, there was the glory of it! And how that little tiny joke about Richter touched the heart! Here on one side was a woman dying, and she knew it, but the wonder and the pleasure of the world was intensely hers. There, on the other, was the excellent Mrs. Armstrong. She could not think about the opera or anything else except her absurd deep-breathing and her ridiculous liver. Nobody else did; nobody cared. Even now I could hear her explaining to her left-hand neighbour that next to deep-breathing, the really important thing

is to drink a glass of water in the middle of the morning. Slowly, of course, in sips. And she proceeded to describe what the water did. Well, I suppose I am old-fashioned, but I could no more think of discussing these intimate matters at the dinner-table than I should think of performing my toilet there. Besides—and this is perhaps the most unanswerable objection to doing so—besides being slightly disgusting, it is so immensely dull !

However, on the other side there was a topic as entrancing as the other was tedious, and in two minutes my other neighbour and I were deep in the fascinating inquiry as to how far a conductor—a supreme conductor—identified himself with the characters of the opera. Certainly the phrase ' Richter is such a splendid Isolde ' was an alluring theme, and by degrees it spread round the corner of the table (we were sitting close to it), and was taken up opposite, when a member of the Purcell Society gave vent to the highly interesting observation that the conductor had practically nothing to do with the singers, and was no more than a sort of visible metronome put there for the guidance of the orchestra. It was impossible not to retort that the last performance of the Purcell Society completely confirmed the truth of that view of the conductor. Indeed, the chorus hardly thought of him even as a metronome. Or else, perhaps, they were deaf, which would account for their sinking a tone and a half ; in fact there were flowers of speech on the subject.

But how extraordinary a thing (taking the view, that is to say, that a conductor conceivably does

more than beat time) is this transference of emotion, so that first of all Wagner, by means of merely black notes and words on white paper, can inspire the conductor with that tragedy of love which years ago he wove out of the sunlight and lagoons of Venice ; that, secondly, the conductor can enter into that mysterious and mystical union with his band and his singers, and reflect his own mood on them so strongly that from throat or strings or wailing of flutes they give us, who sit and listen, what the conductor bade them read into the music, so that all, bassoons and double-bass, flutes and strings, trumpets and oboes and horns, become the spiritual mirror of his emotion. By means of that little baton, by the beckoning of his fingers, he pulls out from them the music which is in his own soul, makes it communicable to them. Indeed, we need not go to the Society for Psychical Research for experiments in thought-transference, for here is an instance of it (unless, indeed, we take the view of this member of the Purcell Society) far more magical, far further uplifted out of the sphere of things which we think we can explain. For the mere degrees of loud or soft, mere alterations in *tempo,* are, of course, less than the ABC of the conductor's office. His real work, the exercise of his real power, lies remote from, though doubtless connected with them. And of that we can explain nothing whatever. He obsesses every member of his orchestra so that by a motion of his hand he gets the same quality of tone from every member of it. For apart from the mere loudness and the mere

time of any passage, there are probably an infinite number of ways of playing each note. Yet at his bidding every single member of the band plays it the same way. It is his thought they all make audible with a hundred instruments which have all one tone ; else, how does that unity reach us sitting in our stalls ?

That is the eternal mystery of music, which alone of the arts deals with its materials direct. It is not an imitation of sound, but sound itself, the employment of the actual waves of air that are the whistle of the wind, and the crash of breakers, and the love-song of nightingales. All other branches of art deal only second-hand ; they but give us an imitation of what they wish to represent. The pictorial artist can do no more than lay a splash of pigment from a leaden tube on to his canvas when he wishes to speak to us of sunlight ; he can only touch an eye with a reflection in its corner to show grief, or take a little from the size of the pupil to produce in us who look the feeling of terror that contracts it. Similarly, too, the sculptor has to render the soft swell of a woman's bosom in marble, as if it was on marble a man would pillow his head. It is all a translation, a rendering in another material, of the image that fills us with love or pity, or the open-air intoxication of an April morning. But the musician works first-hand ; the intangible waves of air, not a representation of them, are his material. It is not with a pigment of sound, so to speak, that the violins shiver, or the trumpets tell us that the gods are entering Valhalla. Music deals with sound

itself, with the whisper that went round the formless void when God said, 'Let there be light,' with all that makes this delicate orchestra of the world, no copy of it, no translation of it, but it itself.

And for the time being, while the curtain is up, the control of these forces, their wail and their triumph, belongs to the conductor. He gives them birth in the strings and the wind; he by the movement of a hand makes them express all that sound expressed to the magician who first mapped them on his paper. Indeed, he does more; he interprets them through his own personality, giving them, as it were, an extra dip in the bath of life, so that their colours are more brilliant, more vital of hue. Or is the member of the Purcell Society right, and is the man who gives us this wonderful Isolde only a metronome?

It is often said that the deaf are far more lonely, far more remotely sundered from the world we know, than are the blind. It is impossible to imagine that this should not be so, for it is not only the sounds that we know we hear, but the sounds of which for the most part we are unconscious, that form the link between us and external things. It commonly happens, as in the dark, that we are cut off from all exercise of the eyes, and yet at such moments we have not been very conscious of loneliness. But it is rare that we are cut off from all sound, and the loneliness of that isolation is indescribable. It happened to me once in the golden desert to the west of Luxor, above the limestone cliffs that rise from the valley where the Kings of Egypt lie entombed.

A REAPING

I had sat down on the topmost bluff of these cliffs, having tethered my donkey down below, for the way was too steep for him, and for several minutes observed my surroundings with extreme complacency. Below me lay the grey limestone cliffs, but where I sat a wave of the desert had broken, and the immediate foreground was golden sand. Farther away, in all hues of peacock green, lay the strip of cultivated land, and beyond, the steel blue of the ancient and mysterious river. It was early yet in the afternoon, and the sun still high, so that the whole land glittered in this glorious high festival of light and colour. And, looking at the imperishable monuments of that eternal civilization, it seemed that one could not desire a more convincing example of the kindliness of the circling seasons, of the beneficence that overlooked the world from generation to generation, so that man might well say that this treasure-house of the earth was inexhaustible. No breeze of any sort was stirring, but the air, pure, hot, invigorating, was absolutely still. But at that moment I suddenly felt as if something was dreadfully wrong, though I did not at once guess what it was. Then came the thought, the identification of what was wrong : it seemed as if the world was dead ; then came the reason for it : it was because there was no sound. For a moment I listened in order to verify this—listened with poised breath and immovable limbs. Yes, I was right : there was no sound of anything at all ; for once the ears were deprived of the delicate orchestra that goes up, a hymn of praise, day and

night from the earth. It was like a dreadful nightmare.

I first tried coughing, to see if that would be companionable, but that did not do ; I coughed, and then silence resumed its reign. I lit a cigarette. I moved, rustled, even got up and walked a little, kicking the pebbles that lay about in the sand. But that was no use, and I perceived where the defect was. I knew I was alive, and could make sounds, but what I wanted was some evidence that something else was alive. But there was none.

Somehow this fact was so disquieting that I sat down again to think about it. In my reasonable mind I knew that absolutely everything was alive, only there was at this moment nothing to tell me so. Not a fly buzzed over the hot sand, not a kite was to be seen wheeling slow as if in sleep, a black speck against the inviolable blue that stretched from horizon to horizon. I was the only thing alive as far as I had evidence. Or supposing—the thought flashed suddenly across me—supposing I, too, was dead ? And what was this—this dome of air and the golden sand ? Was it hell ?

I cannot describe the horror of this. Momentary as was the sensation, it was of a quality, a depth of surcharged panic, which comes to us only in nightmares. I was alone, I was not within touch, in this utter stillness, of any other consciousness, and surely that must be hell, the outer darkness of absolute loneliness, which not even the glorious golden orb swung centre-high in the blue could ever so faintly penetrate. Indeed, it and this

iridescent panorama at my feet only added some secret bitter irony to the outer darkness. All the light, the colour, the heat, which one had so loved was there still, but life was arrested, and there was nobody.

Then quite suddenly and unexpectedly the farcical happened, for from some hundred yards away down below the steep cliff up which I had climbed came a long discordant bray from my donkey, who perhaps felt lonely, too. But I have never heard a sound which was to the spirit so overpoweringly sweet. I heard that, and gave a long breath, and shouted, 'Thank you very much!' for the whole glory of the noon, which silence had blackened, was instantly restored.

One of the interesting things to which I have alluded, in contrast with the tedium of Mrs. Armstrong's health, was occurring to-day, for the thermometer had indeed been up in the nineties, a fact which fills all proper-minded people with pride. Our dear, stuffy old London had registered 92 degrees in the shade at Messrs. Negretti and Zambra's that morning, and I with my own eyes had seen it. It was impossible not to be proud, just as it is impossible not to be proud when one is in a train that is going over seventy miles an hour, a thing that may be timed by the small white quarter-mile posts that are so conveniently established by the side of the line. Once I went in a train that did a mile and a half in seventy-three seconds. I have not got over my elation yet. Or when an extraordinarily vivid flash of lightning occurs, with a congested

angry spasm of thunder coming simultaneously with it, are you not sorry for the nerveless soul that does not thrill with personal elation at power made manifest? Or when Madame Melba sings the last long note of the first act of 'La Bohème'? Or when the organist in King's College Chapel pulls out the tubas, making the windows to rattle in their leaded panes by the concussion of the astonished air? Or when a perfectly enormous wave rides in from the Atlantic, and is transformed suddenly from the illustrious blue giant into a myriad cascades of snowy white, as, jovially dealing itself its own death, as it were, it is dashed against the brown steadfast rock of the land? Or when Legs (I shall speak of him soon), as he did to-day, sliced his drive very badly at the fourth hole at Woking, and hit the front of the engine of an up-train with extraordinary violence, and thereupon collapsed on the tee in speechless laughter for the sheer joy of the gorgeously improbable feat?

For all these things, so I take it, are evidence of the splendid energy of things in general in which we, each of us, have our share. So that when our train goes very fast, or when thunder cracks very loudly, or when blue waves are turned to smoke, though we are not actually responsible in any way for these encouraging facts, which are dependent on pressure in a boiler, electricity in the air, and a disturbance in mid-Atlantic, yet as by some wireless telegraphy, the energy of them is caught in the receiver of ourselves, and we throb back to it, feeling the pulse of life, which is exactly the same life in boiler and cloud and wave as that pulse in our-

selves, which beats at the wrist. Life ! Life ! Life ! All one—all absolutely one !

And to-night, too, though not in any of these particular ways, how it throbs and beats in this hot darkness of June ! For a moment I wished I was in the country, to feel the pulse of the woodland and the garden. For the green things of the earth are awake all June ; they never sleep day or night ; they hold their breath sometimes in the hour before dawn, and they hang their heads sometimes beneath some scurry of summer rain ; but day and night their eyes shine ; they are growing and living, and are always awake till autumn comes, when they doze, and winter comes, when they sleep sound, day and night alike, dreaming, perhaps, of the spring, when from deep sleep they will slowly awake again, aconites first, and soon after daffodils, and then the buds of the hawthorn, little green squibs of leaf. . . .

But I had not gone a hundred yards from the doors within which I had dined, when the mysterious joy of London summer night smote these thoughts of the country into silence. The whole town was awake, theatres were pouring out into the streets, and boarding the giants of the roadway, the snorting smelling motor-buses, their trotting brothers, and the inferior cabs and hansoms, where one could be alone and not stop on the way, but be taken decorously and dully to one's destination. There was news, too, in the evening papers—a horrible murder, I think it was, but the nature of the incident mattered very little. It was incident, anyhow ; something had happened. And without wishing

to know exactly what it was, I felt extraordinarily pleased that something had happened.

The dip of Piccadilly between Devonshire House and Hyde Park was comparatively empty, and a sudden shudder of the mind came across me. I had been sitting next a dear friend, condemned to death. How *could* I have forgotten that, for forgotten it I had, in this riotous summer of London. Then I knew why I had forgotten it. It was because she had been so superior (an odious word, but there is no other) to it herself. That courage, that passionate interest in the dear things of the world, her contempt (for this time there is no need of another word) of death, had been infectious. To her it was a mere incident of life. 'Things in general' were no less real and delightful to her because this incident was coming close, than they were to me, who had not yet, as far as I knew, to look it in the face.

Yet, after all, to any of the others sitting at that table, death, so small an incident to her who had steadfastly regarded it, might in reality be closer than to her. And she exulted in the things of life still : they had lost no interest for her.

I stopped for a moment at the bottom of the hill, as one must when something quite new to oneself strikes one. That was the ideal she had shown. Fearless, undismayed, full of summer. 'And with God be the rest.'

At Hyde Park Corner a coffee-stall and an ice-cream stall jostled each other. Each had its following. But both at the moment seemed to me to be

heretical, and instead I turned into the Park to walk as far as the Alexandra Gate, whence I had to get into Sloane Street.

It was like coming out of the roar of a tunnel into the day again, and one's eyes (though conversely) had to get accustomed to the dark after the glare and noise of the dear streets. A little wind whispered overhead in the planes; a little odour of moist earth came from Rotten Row. Quiet, solitary figures passed, or figures in pairs, closely linked, but for the most part silent. On benches underneath the trees there were pairs of figures. In Heaven's name why not? To flirt, to make love, to look into eyes, is an applauded, and rightly applauded, pursuit in sequestered corners, under palms, beneath the eaves of the staircase, with the band blaring from the ball-room just beyond. But it doesn't seem to strike the fastidious, who write letters to papers about the 'state' of the parks, that it is just possible that there are other people in the world who haven't got ball-rooms and palms, and marble staircases. What are they to do, then? The answer of these letter-writers is deplorably futile, for they talk about indigent marriages! As if you could stop the life of the world by pointing with impious hands towards the Savings Bank! God laughs at it!

But the people who most call attention to the state of the park are those who have sat in the back drawing-room with their 'gurls,' while mamma has been Grenadier at the door, and papa has put a handkerchief over his broad face, when he has

finished his glass of port after lunch (after lunch !), and smokes his cigar in the dining-room. It really is so. Young men and maidens may sit on a plush sofa in the dreadful back drawing-room and behave as young men and maidens should (and if they shouldn't, they will) ; and why in the name of all that is decent should they not sit on a bench in the Park and kiss each other ? Yet the person who objects to their doing so, and who writes to the papers in consequence, is exactly the man who, in his semi-detached villa at some nameless suburb, draws his handkerchief over his face, and obscenely snores, while Jack, a respectable bank-clerk, kisses Maria in the back drawing-room. Good luck to them all, except to the horrible man who snores and writes to the papers when he is awake ! He would be better snoring.

The moon had risen and rode high in a star-kirtled heaven, making a diaper of light and shifting shadow below the shade of the many-elbowed planes. Even now, close on midnight, it was extraordinarily hot, and for a little the grass and the trees made me long again for the true country, where the green things on the earth are native, not, as here, out-casts in the desert island of the streets. Yet, when there is, as in London, so large a colony of castaways, extending, you will remember, right down from beyond the Serpentine Bridge to Westminster, so that, except for the crossing at Hyde Park, one may walk on grass for all these solid miles, one hopes that the trees and flowers are tolerably cheerful, and do not sigh much for the wild places

away from houses. Never was there a town so full of trees as this, for walk as you may in it, you will, I think, with three exceptions only, never find a street from some point in which you cannot see a tree to remind you of shade at noontide and grassy hollows. But the names of those streets shall not here be stated; they must, however, consider themselves warned.

Then the streets again, crowded still with moving figures, each an entrancing enigma to any passenger whose soul is at all alert, and swift with the passage of those glorious motor-buses, pounding and flashing along on their riotous ways, the very incarnation to me of all that 'town' means! I cannot imagine now what London was like without them. It must have been but half alive, half itself. It is impossible to be patient with these curious folk who consider them nuisances, who say (as if anyone denied it) that they both smell and clatter. That is exactly why they are so typical of London; indeed, one is disposed to think that they were not made with hands, but spontaneously generated out of the Spirit of the Town.

And how delightful to observe their elephantine antics if the streets are slippery, when they behave exactly like a drunken man, with appearance still portentously solemn, as if he had heard grave news, but afflicted with strange indecision and uncertainty on questions of the direction in which he intends to walk. I was on one the other day which did the most entrancing things, and had it all to myself, as everybody else got down, not

seeming to see that if a motor-bus has been 'overtaken' it is far safer to be on it than anywhere else in the street, just as a drunken man may lurch heavily with damage to others, but never hurts himself. It was in Piccadilly, too, a beautiful theatre for its manœuvres. Trouble began as we descended the hill by the Green Park: it had *vin gai*, and was boisterously cheerful; but it was extraordinarily uncertain about direction, and slewed violently once or twice, so that hansoms started away from our vicinity as rabbits scuttle from you in the brushwood. Then my bus suddenly pulled itself together and walked quite straight for a lamp-post by the kerb. It felt tired, I suppose, and leaned wearily against it, snapping it neatly off with as little effort as it takes to pluck a daisy. Then it hooted, moved gravely on again, and, thinking it was a member of the Junior Athenæum, made straight for the door. But it forgot to lift its feet up to get on to the pavement, and stumbled. Then it saw a sister-bus, backed away from the pavement, and tried to make friends. But the other simply cut it and passed by. So it gave a heavy sigh, and began to mount the hill towards Devonshire House. But it had scarcely gone twenty yards when the behaviour of its sister so smote upon its heart that it could not go on, and turned slowly round in the street to look back at that respectable but uncharitable relation with pathetic and appealing eyes. It might happen to anybody, it seemed to say, 'to take a drop too much, and you shouldn't judge too severely.'

This sense of being misunderstood gave it *vin triste* of the most pronounced kind. I have seldom seen so despondent a drunkard. It moaned and muttered to itself, and I longed to console it. But beneficent Nature came to its aid: laid her cool hand upon its throbbing head, and it slept. I got gently off, feeling, as Mr. Rossetti, I think, says (if it was not he, it was somebody else), that I must step softly, for I was treading on its dreams.

And all this for a penny, which the conductor very obligingly refunded to me, as I had not been taken where I wanted to go!

Sloane Street, and soon my dear house, into which I was towed by my watch-chain. For my latchkey was on the end of it, and, having opened the door, I could not get the latchkey out, and had to step on tiptoe, following the door as it opened. Wild music came from the upstairs, and, having disentangled my key, I ran up, to find Helen and Legs trying with singular ill-success to play the overture to the 'Meistersingers,' from a performance of which they had just returned. They took not the slightest notice of my entry.

'No!' shouted Legs. 'One, two; wait for two! Oh, do get on! Yes, that's it. Sorry; I thought it was a sharp.'

They were nearing the end, and several loud and unsimultaneous thumps came.

'I've finished,' said Helen.

Legs had one thump more.

'So have I,' he said. 'Isn't it ripping?'

JULY

JULY

HELEN has gone to church, after several scathing remarks about Sabbath-breakers, by whom she means me, and probably also Legs, as I hear the piano being played indoors. As a matter of fact, I have not the slightest intention of breaking anything—though Legs seems to have designs on the strings—for even here under the trees on the lawn it is far too hot to think of such a thing. Several slightly disappointed dogs repose round me, who hoped that perhaps, as I was not going to church, I was going for a walk. This afternoon, I am afraid, they will be disappointed again, for I purpose to go to afternoon service in the cathedral, and they will think I am going for a walk. But on Sunday dogs have to pay for the commissions and omissions of the week.

The bells have stopped, so Helen will quite certainly be late, and the silence of Sunday morning in the country grows a shade deeper. Fifi just now, with an air of grim determination, sat up to scratch herself; but she could not be bothered, and sank down again in collapse on the grass. Legs, too, has apparently found the heat too much even for him, and has stopped playing. And I abandoned myself

to that luxury which can only be really enjoyed on Sunday morning, when other people have gone to church (I wish to state again that I am going this afternoon), of thinking of all the things I ought to do, and not doing them. On Monday and Tuesday, and all through the week, in fact, you can indulge in that same pursuit, but it lacks aroma : it is without bouquet. But give me a chair under a tree on Sunday morning, and let my wife call me names for sitting in it, and then let the church-bells stop. Fifi wants washing. Legs said so yesterday, and we meant to wash her this morning. I must carefully avoid the subject if he comes out, since I don't intend to do so. Then I ought to write to the Secretary of State—having first ascertained who he is—to remind him that Legs is going up for his Foreign Office examination in November, and that his (the Secretary of State's) predecessor in the late Government promised him a nomination. How tiresome these changes of Government are ! One would have thought the Conservatives might have held on till Legs' examination. Then I should not (1) have to consult Whitaker to find out who the present Secretary of State is, and (2) write to him, and—probably—(3) find that either I haven't got a Whitaker, or else that it is an old one. This will entail expense as well.

How the silence grew ! I could not even hear any bees buzz among the flower-beds, and wondered whether bees do no work on Sunday. There was not a sound or murmur of them. Probably this is quite a new fact in natural history, which has never

struck anybody before. It would never have struck me if I had gone to church. Then Fifi pricked one ear, sat up, and snapped at something. It was a winged thing, with a brown body, rather like a bee. How indescribably futile!

Then there came a little puff of wind from the end of the garden, and next moment the whole air was redolent with the scent of sweet-peas. Sweet-peas! How strangely, vastly more intimate is the sense of smell than any other! How at one whiff of odour the whole romance of life, its beautiful joys and scarcely less beautiful sorrows, the dust and struggle and the glory of it, rises up, clad not in the grey robes, or standing in the dim light of the past, but living, moving, breathing—part of the past, perhaps, but more truly part of the present. Like a huge wave from the immortal sea of life, cool and green, and speaking of the eternal depths, yet exulting in sunshine and rainbow-hued in spray, all the memories entwined about this house held and enveloped me. Here lived once Dick and Margery, those perfect friends; here, when they had passed to their triumphant peace, came she whom, when I first saw her, I thought to be Margery. From this house (where still in memory of Margery we plant the long avenue of sweet-peas, because she loved them) two years ago we were married, and here I sit now drowned in the beautiful past that is all so essential a part of this beautiful present.

But it would be as well, perhaps, if this book is to be in the slightest degree intelligible (a thing which I maintain is a merit rather than a defect),

to put together a few simple facts concerning these last two years.

It was two years ago last April that we were married, and took a small house in town, though we still spent a good deal of time down here with Helen's father. But before the year was out he died, leaving everything to Helen, who was his only child. So, as was natural, we continued to live in the house which was so dear to both of us.

Legs is my first cousin, and he has lived with us for a year past, for he has neither father nor mother ; and since he was cramming for his Foreign Office work in town, it was far the best arrangement that he should make his home with us. Legs is the only name he is ever known by, since he is one of those people who are almost unknown by their real name (which in this case is Francis Horace Allenby), and are alluded to only by some nickname which is far more suitable. If, for instance, I said to somebody who knew him quite well, ' Have you seen Francis lately ?' I should probably be favoured with an inquiring stare, and then, ' Oh, Legs, you mean !' while to his million acquaintances (he has more than anyone I ever knew) he is equally Legs Allenby. The name, I need scarcely add, is a personal and descriptive nickname, for Legs chiefly consists of them. When he sits down, he would be guessed to be well on the short side of middle height ; when he stands up he is seen to be well on the farther shore of it. He was Legs at school, and his family, very sensibly, and all his friends, saw how impossible it was to call him Francis any more. For the rest,

he is just over twenty, sandy-haired, freckle-faced, and green-eyed, with a front tooth broken across, a fact that is continually in evidence, since he is nearly always laughing. It would be sheer nonsense to call him good-looking, but it would be as sheer to call him ugly, since, when you have got a face like Legs', either epithet has nothing to do with it. But I have never seen any boy with nearly so attractive and charming a face, and Legs, whose nature is quite as nice as his face, and extremely like it, has the most splendid time.

And that, to finish these tedious explanations, is our household. There is no other inmate of it—no little one, you understand.

Legs is an enthusiast—a fanatic on the subject of life. Everything, including even his foreign languages, which he has to cram himself with, is the subject of his admiration, and he discovers more secrets of life than the rest of the world put together. At one time it is a chord which is meat and drink to him; at another the romances of Pierre Loti; or, again, golf is the only thing worth living for, while occasionally some girl, or, as often as not, a respectable elderly married woman, usurps his heart. Last week he discovered that there were only two people in town the least worth talking to, but yesterday, when I asked him who the second one was, having forgotten myself, I found that he had forgotten too, for if the "Meistersinger" overture was not enough for anybody, he was a person of no perception.

'Why, it contains all there is,' he had said, when he finished it the other evening with Helen. 'It's all there, the whole caboodle.'

But this morning, from the silence indoors, I imagine he must have found another caboodle—a book probably. Or equally possible, Legs has an attack of acute middle-age, which occasionally takes him like a bad cold in the head. Then he wonders whether anything is worth doing, and is sorry for Helen and me, because we are so frivolous. Six months ago, I remember, he had such an attack, induced by reading a book about three acres and a cow, which raised in him the sense of injustice that all of us three had so much more than that. During this period he took no sugar in his tea, refused wine, and began to write a book which was called 'Tramps,' contrasting the horror of indigence with the even greater horror of extravagance. It was really directed against Helen and me, for we had lately bought a small, snuffling motor-car. These outbursts of Socialism are generally coincident with Atheism. But they do not last long: Legs soon feels better again.

I was right, it appeared, about the conjecture that he had found a book, but I was wrong about the attack of middle-age. Legs jumped out of the drawing-room window with wild excitement.

'Oh, I say!' he cried, 'why did you never tell me? I thought Swinburne was an awful rotter! But just listen.'

And he read: 'When the hounds of spring are in winter's traces.'

'Did you ever hear anything like it?' he said. '"Blossom by blossom the spring begins!" Why, it's magic! Oh, don't I know it! Do you remember—I suppose you don't—when all the daffodils came out together last year?'

'Oh, Legs, what an ass you are!' I said. 'Because you never noticed them till I showed you them.'

'No, I believe that's true. Oh, don't argue! Listen!'

And he began all over again.

Then he lay back on the grass with his hands underneath his head, looking up unblinking into the face of the sun. That, by the way, is another peculiarity of his: he looks straight at the sun at noonday, and is not dazzled. His eyes neither blink nor water. He can't understand why other people don't look at the sun.

Then—if by any chance you care to understand this quiet, delightful life we lead, it is necessary that you understand Legs—then his mood suddenly changed.

'Oh, I'm wrong about the daffodils,' he said; 'you showed me them. But this chap *is* a daffodil. I suppose he's quite old, too. I wonder how you can get old, if you have ever felt like that. What a waste of time it is to do anything if you can feel. I hate this Foreign Office affair: why shouldn't I do nothing?'

'Because you can't,' I remarked.

'What do you mean?'

I had not been to church, and so had heard no sermon. Therefore, I preached one on my own account.

'You will know in about fifteen years,' I said. 'Anyhow, you will find that, unless you are brainless and absurd, you must do something. You are quite wrong. It isn't nearly enough to feel. The moment you "feel," you want to create. You not only want, but you have to; you can't possibly help yourself. You have just read that heavenly poem. You now want to write something like it. You hear what spring once said to a poet, and you want to put down what spring says to you!'

'Oh, you're quite wrong,' said Legs. 'He has said what spring means. That's the last word on the subject. But summer now: this, to-day——'

'So you want to create,' said I.

A glorious trait about Legs is that he never admits conviction. He only changes the subject. Thus, if the subject is changed by him, his controversialist is satisfied.

'I don't believe in the highest of the shortest suit if your partner doubles,' he said. 'What are you to do if you have two spades and two clubs all contemptible?'

'Lead the less contemptible.'

Legs turned slowly over on his side, and lay with his face against the short turf of the lawn, '"Blossom by blossom," he said, '"the spring begins." I wonder if he meant more than that! Did he mean to tell of the time when one is young oneself, and it is all blossom? Lord, how priggish that sounds! But it is all blossom, except for this beastly German. I hate German! It sounds as if you were gargling. Damn! I have to go up by

the early train to-morrow, too! And you and Helen will stop here till after lunch. Grind, grind—oh, I lead the life of a dog! And then, if I am very successful, I shall have the privilege of sitting on a stool in a beastly building in Whitehall, and writing a *précis* from some silly old man in Vienna or Madrid, about nothing at all. It isn't worth it!'

Legs and I, it will be observed, deal largely in contradictions.

'Yes, it is,' I said. 'Everything almost that one does is worth it. As long as you are actively doing anything with all your heart, you can't be wasting time, nor can there be anything better worth doing. It is only when you say that a thing isn't worth doing that it becomes so.'

Legs sat up again.

'Oh, I want nine lives at least!' he said. 'Or why can't one buy some of the time that hangs so heavy on other people's hands? I know a man who reads the *Times* all through every morning, and the *Globe* every evening. Yet, after all, I dare say it is quite as improving as sitting here and talking rot as we are doing. I shall go and put in half an hour over that accursed Teutonic language before lunch.'

Legs had, as it seemed to me, run over most of the topics of human interest in the few minutes he had been out, and since I was still irrevocably determined neither to wash Fifi, nor to write to the Secretary of State, nor, indeed, to open the very large book on the crisis in Russia, which I had

brought out with me (to bring out a book on Sunday morning and not to open it is strictly in accordance with the spirit of the thing), my mind went slowly browsing, like a meditative cow, over the dazzling display he had spread before me. And instinctively and instantaneously I found myself envying him, though why I envied him I did not immediately know. But it was soon obvious ; I envied his power of making soul-stirring discoveries ; his rapture over that magical spring song of the man he had thought 'an awful rotter.' I envied him his ignorance of the perfectly patent fact that it is only fools who can go on doing nothing, and of the fact that it is infinitely better to sit on a stool and do arithmetic for stockbrokers than to do nothing at all. But youth does not know that, and I think I envied him his youth. Yet—so often does one contradict oneself—I knew very soon that I did not envy him any of these things. After all, I still went on making soul-stirring discoveries, and propose to do so until the very end of my life, when I shall make the most soul-stirring discovery of all, which is death. And to envy the fact of his having just discovered the magic of Swinburne's spring song would be exactly the same as envying the appetite of somebody who has just come down to breakfast, when you are half-way through. Your eggs and bacon were delicious, but the fact that you have eaten them makes it impossible to wish for them again. And it should make you only delighted that other people keep coming down to breakfast—till the end of your life they will do that, unless the world comes to an end

first—and, thank God, they will find eggs and bacon delicious too, hungry and fresh in the morning of their lives.

I was becoming slightly too active in mind for the proper observance of Sunday morning (given, of course, that you have chosen not to go to church), for the real attitude is a state of tranquil bemusedness, but it was too late to stop now. . . . What, in fact, did I want? Did I want to be twenty again, and go through the days and hours of those fifteen years once more?

Yes, I did. If the world could be turned back for fifteen years, I would gladly take my place there, and go through it all, good and bad together, just as it has happened. I would encore this delightful song, in fact, and be content that it should be sung again—it, not another song. Of course, if one could start again at the age of twenty—or ten, for that matter—and live it over again with the knowledge, infinitesimal as it is, that one has gained now, I imagine that the vast majority of the world would put the hands of the clock back. On all those thousands of occasions on which one has acted stupidly, unkindly, evilly, and has probably suffered for it without delay (for it is mercifully ordained that we have not long to wait before our punishment begins, especially if we have been foolish), we should now do differently, remembering that it did not pay—to put things at their lowest—to be asses and knaves. Apart from that, we should have the same beautiful, flawless days again, when, so I cannot but think, the beneficent power has somehow come very

close to us and our surroundings, and by its neighbourhood has given us a series, again and again repeated, of hours in which we have been unable to imagine anything better than what we have got. We have wanted, with all the eager happiness that wanting gives, and we have obtained; but before any leanness of the soul has entered we have wanted again. We have had happiness, not content (since that implies the end of wanting) but happiness, the content that dwells not in the present only, but looked forward. I have no idea whether, on the whole, I am happier than the average of other people, since there is no thermometer yet invented that can register that. But I do know that I would choose to go back and live it all over again, *as it has been*. With the little experience, the little knowledge that must inevitably come with years, whether one is stupid or not, I imagine that everybody would choose to go back, but I wish to state distinctly that I would go back without that. I suppose it was that which made me just now feel I envied Legs. But I don't do that really for this reason.

Supposing that what I should choose (because I really should) were given me, what then? I should arrive again eventually in the mere measure of years at the point where I am now, no different, no better, no worse. I should like to go back, because it has been *such fun*. But there is better than that ahead: of that I am completely convinced. There are as many (if not more, and I think there are more) entrancing discoveries from middle age as there have

been from youth, and I am convinced again that if one happens to live to be old there will be as many more.

After all, to re-read life again would be like re-reading the first volume of an absorbing book. One has revelled in the first volume, and naturally wants to revel again. But what is going to happen ? There is nothing that interests me so much as that. To-day, even in this quiet domestic life of ours, there are a hundred threads leading out into unknown countries, all of which, if one lives, one will follow up. And all, big and tiny alike, are so stupendous. If, to take the forward view, I could see in a mirror now what and where all those people—few of them, no doubt, but friends—those who really matter, would be in a year's time, how I should seize the magic reflector, and gaze into it ! Incomparable as has been the romance of life up till now, it is known to me. But to peep into the second volume !

The sun, in the full blaze of which Legs had laid, peeped over the top of the elm in shade of which I had seated myself, and, not being Leggish, I shifted my chair again to consider this point.

It is a question of scale that is here concerned, though the scale seems to me to be an unreal one. If I happened to be the Emperor of All the Russias, and the magic mirror were given me, I should look eagerly out for my own figure, and see if I still wore a crown. I should scrutinize the faces of those around me, to see if war and the hell-hag of revolution had been shrieking through my illimitable country. But my interests are not soul-

stirring to any but me, and anyhow not of European importance. So I should look to see who sat on this lawn a year hence ; I should ask for a short survey of the Embassy at Paris, to see if Legs was attached ; I should visit a dozen houses or so. But if I was allowed to put the clock back fifteen years, I should have to wait longer for this. . . . So I must reconsider my choice, and I am afraid I must reverse it. But it must be understood that I choose not to be twenty again, merely because it will take longer to be forty and fifty. I want the second volume so much.

'Or . . .' Here Helen's voice broke in. She had come back from church, and had seated herself on the grass, and I believe that half of what appeared to be soliloquy was actually spoken to her. But she is wonderfully patient.

'It is youth you want,' she said, 'and you have got it till you cease to want it. It is only people who don't care about it that grow old. Or is there more than that ? Is it wanting to go on learning that keeps one young ?'

A dreadful misgiving came over me.

'Am I dreaming ?' I said. 'Or did you tell me the other day that I showed signs of wishing to teach ?'

She laughed.

'No ; it is quite true. But I will tell you when you cease to wish to learn. I shall say it quite, quite clearly.'

She took off her hat, and speared it absently with a pin.

'We had an awful sermon,' she said, 'all about the grim seriousness of life, and the opportunities that will never come back. It does seem to me it is most absolute waste of time to give a thought to that. I shan't go to church next Sunday. I don't feel fortified by thoughts like that. It's much better for me to know that you would put the clock back, and live it all over again. But about looking forward. Oh, Jack, I think I shouldn't look in the magic mirror if I had the chance. What if one saw oneself all alone? One would live in dread afterwards."

'Or what if you saw a cradle in the room?' said I.

She looked up at me quickly, and then put out her hands for me to pull her up.

'Perhaps I should look in the mirror,' she said.

Poor Legs, as he had said, left by a very early train next morning, and Helen, moved by a sudden violent attack of vague duty, went with him. The access was quite indeterminate. She thought merely that one ought to get back to town early on Monday, so as to have the whole day there instead of splitting it up. Personally I followed neither her reasoning nor her example, and intended to spend the day in dignified inaction in the country, and not split it up by going to town till after dinner. But to the owner of a motor-car the train appears a degraded sort of business, and, greatly daring, I meant to start about nine in the evening, and be the monarch of the road; for when there is no other traffic, any car becomes a chariot of triumph.

Helen, I may remark, loves our motor when she does not want to go anywhere particular. When she does she takes the train. I think, in fact, that it was my proposal that we should drive up together after dinner that was the direct parent of her sense of duty.

So, when I came down at the not unreasonable hour of nine to breakfast, I found that I had the house to myself, and—I am not in the least ashamed of the confession—found that the prospect of an absolutely solitary day was quite to my mind. I do not believe myself to be unsociable or morose, but every now and then I confess that I like a day in which I see nobody. It is not that one is busy, and wants to get through one's work, for, on the contrary, when I have a great deal to do, I hugely desire the presence and the conversation of friends in the intervals of 'doing.' But occasionally it is a very good thing to chew and ruminate, to be surrounded by the quiet green things of the earth, which give you all their best without waking the corresponding instinct to exchange ideas, to give something of yours to meet theirs. For intercourse with one's fellow-men, especially with one's friends, is like some rapid interchange of presents. Everybody (everybody, at least, who has the smallest sense of sociability) searches in his mind for any little thing that may be there, and gives it his friend, while the friend, accepting it, gives something back. From all that—we cannot call it an effort since it is so completely spontaneous on both sides—it is well to be free

occasionally, to lie, so to speak, under the pelting rain of life that is ever poured out from the voiceless, eloquent, bright-eyed happiness of Nature, to make no plan, to contemplate no contingency, to drop that sort of fencing rapier that we all wield when we are with our fellow-men, and lie like a log, with one eye open it may be, and be rained upon by the things that live, and are clothed and nourished without toil or spinning.

I am aware that the great Strenuists, from Mr. Roosevelt downwards, would hold up their toil-hardened hands at this, exclaiming : ' You mean it is better now and then to be a cow than a Man ? Precisely so, but cows are not nearly as inactive as Man on these occasions ought to be. They eat too long, and they switch their tails, and stamp their feet. But the long, stupid, bovine gaze is moderately correct. At least, I have never detected a shadow of intelligence in a cow's eye. If there is any, the man who occasionally becomes a cow must be careful to get rid of it. Nor must he be a cow too often : that is fatal. If he is a cow for one day in every six weeks, I think he will find the proportion is about right.

So all day, literally all day, I sat, or, when sitting became too fatiguing, lay on the lawn, and nothing happened that did not always happen, but all was worth observing in a purely bovine manner, without intelligence. Little brown twigs occasionally fell from the elms, and once or twice a withered yellow leaf came spinning on its own axis, as if it was the screw of some unseen steamer. A stag-beetle

walked slowly down from the wooden paling, and came some ten yards across the lawn. It stopped there about an hour, I should think, doing nothing whatever. Then it turned and went back on to the paling again. A robin took about the same length of time to make up his mind that I was quite harmless, and eventually pecked at my bootlace, which was undone. It took him an enormous time to decide, with his head cocked sideways, whether it had tasted nice or not, but eventually he settled it did not, for he did not peck it again. Then a jackdaw sat on one of the poles of the tennis-net, and said ' Jarck ' seventeen times after I began to count. He began to say it the eighteenth time, but stopped in the middle and ate an incautious earwig.

That was almost too exciting, and I transferred not my attention, because I had not got any, but my bovine gaze to the big flower-bed opposite. All summer was there, dim, hot, blossoming summer in full luxuriance of growth, so that scarcely a square inch of earth was visible. I did not even name the dear familiar flowers that grew there. One was a spire of blue, one was a cluster of orange ; there was an orchestra of red trumpets, a mist of starry grey, and bits of sky caught in a web of green. And from beyond (I could not help naming that) came the odour of sweet-peas. I lay and soaked in it.

To use a simile, do you know those mysterious things which are to be found on the chalk downs, called dew-ponds ? Often, of course, they are fed

with rain, but even when for months no rain has fallen, you will still find them full. They just lie open to the sky, and that is all. And the mind, so it seems to me, is something like them. Often it is fed in the obvious way, as the dew-pond with rain, by conscious thought, by active intercourse with others. But sometimes it is not a bad thing for it to be like the dew-pond, just to lie open to the sky, and drink in the eternal wine of Nature, which fills its pond again. All that is required of it is to do nothing whatever, not to think even, but just to be there, to be in existence, to let go of everything. It really is worth the experiment, though it is not quite so easy as it sounds, for thoughts, ideas of some kind, keep leaking in. They must be firmly excluded.

The snuffling motor rose like a hero to the occasion, and came round throbbing with excitement. Something in the idea of this drive by night had evidently taken its fancy, and it positively burned to exceed the legal limit, a wish that I was only too glad to gratify. When we started the crimson of the sunset was still aflame in the west, but gradually the colour was withdrawn, as if some unseen hand was pulling out scarlet threads that ran through some exquisite fabric of dainty embroidery, leaving there only the soft transparent ground of it. Then more gradually, so that the eye could not trace the appearance of each, but only knew that the number was being multiplied, behind the dark velvet of the sky were lit the myriad suns that make a flame of

space, and sing in their orbits. Colours faded and disappeared, and soon the world was turned to an etching of black and white. The roads were empty of traffic, and though July was here, still from dark coppice and leafy screen there sounded the one eternal song, the rapture of nightingales. Often it seemed to me as if we were standing still, while the world in its revolution span by us ; there was but a space of lamp-lit road by which, shadow-like, dream-like, the trees and open spaces ran. For a long piece together, as over the Hartford Bridge flats, nothing marked our passage except this whirling of the world. It seemed in the darkness that time had ceased, and that from its own impetus this globe and the thousand globes above were circling still.

Then in front there began to shine, like the reflected light of some comet coming nearer, the huge glow-worm of London. For a while it rested, like some remote befogged star on the horizon ; then its light brightened, and its little crawling caterpillars, the trams and buses, began to creep by us, reaching out, as it were, to the end of the leaf, the greenest and most succulent parts.

Then, like the opening of a photographer's shutter, so swift it was, we were in the traffic of the town again, and all was familiar, all was home. The country was home too, and here was another. Which was the truer sense ? The sense that claimed the jackdaw on the tennis-net as a brother, or the sense that rejoiced in this fierce-beating pulse of life ?

Perhaps, since they are both true, there is no question of comparison.

AUGUST

AUGUST

SOMETHING of the primeval savage blood still beats in us, we must suppose, else why is it that we, effete inhabitants of London, who love the closeness and proximity of our fellow-men so much, feel no less keenly the rapture of being miles and miles away from railways and the folk who travel on them? How quick, too, is the transition from one mood to another, so that while a week or two ago we rushed insanely, it may be, but with extraordinary pleasure, from party to party, jabbering with child-like delight to myriad acquaintances, face to face on a blocked staircase, or in the drawing-room unwillingly silent while somebody sang, we now take the same childlike pleasure in long days of solitude. But we may take our solitude in pairs, in company with a friend who for the time being is no friend at all, but a bitter (and, it is to be hoped, disappointed) golfer, or we may lie out all day in the heather with a silent stalker, or, as has been my fortunate lot for the last ten days, may spend long hours, with a sandwich and a fishing-rod and a gillie, in angling over coffee-coloured streams or windswept lochs.

A REAPING

The oldest inhabitants never remember anything like this summer, but they are bad evidence, because their memories are probably very defective owing to their age; but, what is more convincing, younger people, whose memories are less impaired, never remember anything like it. So there has been little of the coffee-coloured streams for me personally, but, instead, long quiet days by this wonderful loch, supposed to hold trout of fabulous dimensions, which, as far as I can make out, nobody has ever caught, though everyone agrees that they are there. Then came a wonderful day, with more than trout-wonder in it.

I came up here to this remote lodge alone, for the trio of us usually go our own ways in holiday time. Legs, in any case, had to go to Germany to learn that classic and guttural tongue, and Helen and I always make visiting arrangements independently of each other, unless we are both bidden to a house to which we both want to go. But it stands to reason, so it seemed to us, that husband and wife probably do not have the same friends, and it is as absurd for her to stay at a house because the host is a great friend of mine as it is for me to stay at a house because the hostess is a great friend of hers. Coincidences sometimes happen, in which case we both go together. Otherwise we make our own arrangements. I cannot bear some of her friends; she finds it almost impossible to tolerate some of mine. And with shouts of laughter we agree to differ. Then in September or October the trio will come together again, and will all talk at once, describing simul-

taneously, while nobody listens, our delightful adventures.

I started from the lodge that morning after an early breakfast, the gillie having already gone on with lunch, and what we hoped would be the apparatus of death; for, the first time during this last week, it was a soft and cloudy morning, with a warm wind from the south-west, sufficient even in this cup of the hills, where the lodge stands, to set the trees tossing their branches, and to strip the red ripe rowan-berries from their stalks. Upon the unsheltered tops, then, where lay the dark-coloured loch with its fabled inhabitants, there should be ripple enough for fishing purposes. I walked unencumbered but for the field-glasses I always carry; for nothing, during periods of waiting or in the half-hour that follows the sandwich, is so fascinating as to spy out the busy animal life on these empty moors, or find some three or four miles away two or three little human specks moving very gently up the hill-side after the deer, or sitting there patiently till some untoward affair, suspicious hinds, or a foul wind are lulled into inactivity.

But first I had a mile of pine-wood to climb, up steep, slippery, needle-strewn paths, with bracken already yellowing on each side, making a sea of russet and green, while from overhead, in the thick arching boughs, there came, as it were, the noise of an aerial sea, the hiss of ripples on a sandy shore as the wind whistled through the stiff springy foliage. Now and then a rabbit scuttled through the ferns, and once I saw quite close at hand a roe-deer with

flicking ears and startled eyes, that, as it caught sight of me, gave me one shy look of the woodland, and then galloped off, cutting its way through the tall bracken. The path sometimes led by the side of the stream that came out of the loch to which I was bound, but the dryness of the summer had hushed its voice, and it but trickled down the ways it was wont to prance along in spring. Here and there a tree of the tamer woodland, a beech, or stripling elm, grew among the primeval firs, but it looked as if it had wandered here by mistake, had strayed, a member of some later civilization, into a settlement peopled by those of the older world.

And as I walked something of the same feeling of strangeness, of having gone back to the earlier ages of the world, came over me also. Like the lost beech, there were none of my kind here, and I felt, though in an immeasurably greater degree, what one feels when one stands in the valley of the tombs of the Egyptian Kings. But all round me here were things far more ancient than they. Æons before Pharaoh oppressed the children of promise there stood here on this hillside the ancestors in direct line of this woodland. The knowledge of the dawn of the world, when it was still but a little time since God had bidden the green things to live upon the earth, had been transmitted to these citizens of the hillside, and to them time had been but a little thing, and a thousand ages were but as yesterday.

As I ascended further and more remotely into the heart of the wood, a sort of eager tremor, a desire to

see that which I knew was there, and which must be so overpowering in its immensity, began to grow on me. Wild silent life bubbled and hummed round me ; eyes watched me from beneath the fern, and looked down on me from the over-arching fans of the pines ; ears were pricked at my footstep ; strange wild smiles broadened into a laugh at the intruder, at this child of immeasurably later ages. Sometimes it seemed to me as if this ancient consciousness of the woods was scornful and contemptuous, so that I quickened my pace and longed to get out of this dark room ; at other moments, and truer ones, I knew better, knowing that I, too, was of it all, a manifestation of life, a piece of the pine-woods and brother of the bracken.

There is no myth that grew so close to the heart of things as the story of Pan, for it implies the central fact of all, the one fact that is so indisputably true, that all the perverted ingenuity of man has been unable to split into various creeds about it. For Pan is All, and to see Pan or to hear him playing on his pipes means to have the whole truth of the world and the stars, and Him who, as if by a twisting thumb and finger, set them endlessly spinning through infinite Space, suddenly made manifest. Flesh and blood, as the saying is, could not stand that, and there must be a bursting of the mortal envelope. Yet that, indisputably also, is but the cracking of the chrysalis. How we shall stand, weak-eyed still and quivering, when transported from the dusk in which we have lived this little life, into the full radiance of the eternal day !

How shall our eyes gain strength and our wings expansion and completeness, when the sun of which we have seen but the reflection and image is revealed! That is to see Pan. It killed the mortal body of Psyche—the soul—when she saw him on the hill-top by the river, and heard the notes of his reed float down to her; but she and every soul who has burst the flimsy barrier of death into life joins in his music, and every day makes it the more compelling. Drop by drop the ocean of life, made up of the lives that have been, rises in the bowl in which God dips His hands. He touches every drop.

The wood in front had grown thin, and I was nearly out on the open heather of the hills. Just here the path crossed the stream bed; a great grey cliff of rock was above me, in which a pattern of lichens had found crevices for their roots; the pine-trees waved solemnly overhead; the miracle of running water, perhaps the greatest miracle of all, chuckled and eddied as it slid into the brown pool. And quite seriously I waited to see Pan. The ferns would be pushed aside, and the merry face would smile at me (for Pan, though he kills you, is kind), and he would put his pipes to his lips, and the world, as I had hitherto seen it, would swim away from me. And just before he puts his pipes to his mouth, I hope I shall say: 'Yes, begin; I am ready!' Or shall I stop my ears, and shut my eyes to him? I hope not. But the fern waved only, and the water ran, and . . . and I was going a-fishing.

I suppose I had not gone more than a hundred

yards after this pause when execrable events occurred. It seemed as if some dreadful celestial housemaid suddenly woke up, and went on with her work. She shut the window (that is to say, the wind dropped), and began to dust. She dusted all the clouds away, and in ten minutes there was not one left. From horizon to horizon there was a sky positively Egyptian, and an abominable sun shone with hooligan ferocity. And I was going a-fishing! I said what I should not say with such extraordinary distinctness and emphasis that I rapidly took out my field-glass, and swept the untenanted fields of heather to see that there was no one within a mile or two. But I expect the roe-deer heard.

Sandy was waiting for me at the near end of the loch, when I arrived there a quarter of an hour afterwards. Scotchmen are never cynical, but I should otherwise have suspected him of cynicism when I saw that he had been at pains to set up my rod, and was soaking a length of gut. The brilliance of the sun from the polished and untarnished field of water was a thing to make the eyes dazzle. So I was cynical in turn, and, from pure cynicism and nothing else at all, I put on (for the sake of the curious) an astonishing fly, with a green body bound with silver, and a Zulu. It was a shade too cynical to go out in the boat, for I think Sandy would have seen through that, as it was impossible that any fish should rise at anything in this state of affairs, and I fished from the shore. Fishing at all was an idiotic proceeding, and so the incredible happened. I wish to call

attention to the incredibility of it, since it happens to be true.

Here was I, then, on a still and windless morning, with a blazing sun overhead, and a looking-glass loch in which were supposed to be monstrous fish, whose shyness apparently increased in ratio to their weight, for nobody had ever seen them before, but had only heard about them second-hand, like ghost stories. Half a dozen casts carried out a convenient length of line, which fell, so it appeared to me, on the glassy surface of the water like the cane of an angry schoolmaster, resonant and cruel. Then at the end of the cane, where the Zulu was, there came a boil just underneath the looking-glass ; my rod bent, and the reel screamed. For one moment I knew, so I thought (for the boil came just as I was preparing to cast again), that I had hooked some stalwart weed, or perhaps a snag of tree-trunk. Then I knew I had hooked a fish. He was clearly insane to have taken a fly at all, but what mattered was that he was a large lunatic. I thought I knew also that this was but the first act of what would turn out to be a tragedy. But the tragedy was not for me.

Again, for the sake of the curious, I will give his weight. He turned the scale at five pounds some six hours later. So I imagine he was about five and a half when he came out of the water with the Zulu in his mouth. He was mad ; he turned a fierce Bedlamite eye on me.

I dare say I am more impatient than the true fisherman, but when I have cast my fly upon the

waters for three hours without a hint of a rise, I sit down, and do not feel it incumbent on me to rise again unless conditions change. So when, at about two o'clock, nothing further had broken the surface of the loch except the cane of the schoolmaster, I felt, after eating my sandwich, that I was not unlikely, without incurring the contempt of Sandy, to prolong the interval. I wanted also, after my mis-tryst with Pan that morning, vaguely also, after that day of bovine observance of Nature which I had spent a week or two ago in the garden at home, to 'sit up and take notice.' Instead of nirvanic contemplation, I wanted to focus all that surrounded me, not to see a stag-beetle advance ten yards, and then go back to the place he advanced from, but to see the activity of it all, to be alert and to collect, not to be lazy and to soak.

Yes; it was a wonderful day. Almost immediately I spied two little human figures on the adjoining forest creeping, creeping up a steep brae. A mile below I saw their ponies. They moved so slowly that it was only possible to see they moved at all, because they passed out of the field of my glass; the deer I could not find.

Then, after watching them for ten minutes more, I saw they stopped. Stealthy movements went on. Then came the sharp crack of a rifle, but before the report reached me they had both jumped up, and ran into a hollow of the hills, where I lost them. It was like being at sea, and having news twitched out from the receiver of a Marconi apparatus.

But hardly had that drama been played to its

curtain when another started. The call of a startled grouse, 'Come back, come back, come back!' sounded close at hand, and it was followed by another and yet another. Sandy had remained by the edge of the loch when I climbed this hillock for my lunch, and since then I had been very quiet, so I could not imagine what had caused this commotion on the hill, as the stalkers were not on this beat at all to-day. I could account, in fact, for the movements of any human being that could have disturbed grouse for a mile or two. Then I looked up to the enormous sky, and saw.

Above me, but close, so that I could see the outspread feathers of the wing, was a golden eagle. As I watched I saw he was not vaguely circling, looking out for prey, but employed in his stalk, even as on the other side of the valley ten minutes ago I had watched another stalk. He was sweeping wide circles of the moor, and driving up towards a gully of the hills behind the fowls of the mountain, flying in low and ever narrowing semicircles, so that it must seem to the terrified grouse and black game that huge-winged danger threatened from every quarter but that. Yet still I could not guess what his plan was when he had driven them there.

And then I saw. Straight down from the grey crag of cliff that rose on the west of this gulley, into which he had driven the birds, there dropped his mate, savage and hungry, seeking her meat from God. Aha, you grand Mistress Eagle; it is dinner-time!

Merrily and well has the old cock-grouse lived in

the heather, lying warm in the sun, and filling himself with the good things of the moorland, but to-day Pan sends him to your table, and in the swift hissing down-rush of your wings he hears his pipes. Pan will play them for you, too, some day, and the grey film will cover over your fierce yellow eye that was wont undazzled to behold the sun in his strength, and the strong hooked beak which gasped for one breath more of the aromatic moorland air will close, and be hungry no more, and the crooked, horny talon will relax, and next year, maybe, I shall find whitened bones on the hillside, and perhaps, crumpled up under them, a feather, an eagle's feather. But I shall not be so foolish as to say I have found you, for do I imagine that that is all there is of you, that your life, your spirit, has been blown out like a candle? I know better than that.

For, indeed, there is no other explanation possible of the incessant war, the death, the murder, the butchery in which Nature's fair hands are steeped and stained, except by this one supposition that the spirit of bird and beast escapes at the moment of death from the splendid sunlit prison of this beautiful world, which has the bright-eyed hours for its bars. Otherwise the world becomes a mere intolerable shambles, viler than Chicago. I at any rate cannot believe otherwise, but should any sceptical reader at this point ask me to sketch out for him the subsequent movements of the wasp he has just squashed in the tongs, or the trout I have just landed, I hasten to assure him that I have not the slightest idea about

them. But that does not invalidate the explanation, nor in the least disturb my complete belief in it. I do not know what the weather will be this day year. But I make no manner of doubt that there will be weather of some kind. I only insist that he with his tongs, and I with my Zulu-fly, cannot destroy life. One cannot even destroy matter; how much less, then, the lord and master of matter!

I think I have never been in a house where absurd gaiety—the gaiety of friends, of health, of outdoor spirits—was so rampant as here; and she whose house it was, and who was leader of the ludicrous, was she, as you may have guessed, who in June had asked me to come here for the last time. That evening when I got home I found her sitting out in the garden enjoying the last half-hour of sunset, and she beckoned to me across the lawn.

'It's true,' I said. 'I have caught the original trout. He had gone mad from old age and riotous living, and came to the fly when the sun was brightest and the winds were dead.'

'I wish you wouldn't use such beautiful language,' she said. 'How much does he weigh?'

'About a ton. He has gone to be weighed now.'

'And anything else?'

'Not a fin. No more bites, as somebody said last night. I chattered with rage.'

'You did; and what have you been thinking about?' she asked.

'Pan chiefly. No, to be honest, I think I have thought about the fish most. But Pan next!'

She turned rather slowly on her long wicker-couch, the tired aching body for the moment usurping the use of her eyes.

'Ah, don't let us talk,' I said; 'you are tired and suffering.'

At that she laughed.

'All the more reason for thinking about something less inferior than one's own health,' she said. 'What cowards we are nowadays! Why, our forebears in Elizabeth's time used to go smiling to the rack for the sake of some small difference of dogma, and we snivel when we have the opportunity of showing, by our contempt for pain, the truth of things that matter much more. If bravery in the abstract and cheerfulness are not worth being brave and cheerful for, I don't know what is. In any case, what conclusion did you come to about Pan? Oddly enough, I have been thinking of him, too. Let's compare notes, and see if we mean the same person.'

I told her more or less what I have already written down on the subject, and at the end she nodded at me with the quick eager gesture that was so characteristic of her.

'Hurrah!' she said. 'I have guessed the same. So perhaps our guesses are right. But I put it to myself rather more personally, and, though it sounds conceited, so much more vividly than you. That is only natural, you know; Pan concerns me much more immediately than he concerns you, we hope. And another image of him suggested itself to me,

which appeals to me more than your figure of the ferns being pushed aside, and the hand with the pipes in it being raised to the smiling lips. Listen !'

The sun had dropped behind the big trees to the west of the lawn, leaving us in shadow, though it still shone on the hills to the east of the house. But evening was coming without any chill or whisper of autumn in it, and in this northern latitude nights were short in August. It was as if she already saw dawn.

'Jim and I and our children,' she said, 'and you and all my friends are shipwrecked, or so it would seem to anyone who did not understand, on a little rock surrounded by infinite sea. Everyone alive in the world is there, too, as a matter of fact, but our friends somehow are so big to us, and strangers and acquaintances so small in comparison that all that really is seen by us is our own immediate circle. Huge thumping seas surround our rock, and, for some occult reason, we all have to sit exactly where we are, while the waves rush up, and every moment sweep somebody away. We can't move our places, and go higher up on the rock, and we have to sit and look at the big waves, we poor shipwrecked people (so a man who does not understand would say), and know that this wave or the next will wash us off. That is the ignorant view of the situation, and the most pessimistic, so we will answer it at once.

'Even if it was right, what then? Supposing we were shipwrecked, and all round us was the

howling sea of death, would it not be much better, until the wave swept us off, to make the best of it, to talk, and laugh, and be pleasant with our friends, instead of looking with terror-stricken eyes at the hungry sea? How much nicer even for ourselves to be amused and talk a little while, instead of being frightened, and how much nicer for our friends when we are swept off, as we all certainly shall be, to know that before we were swept off we were moderately cheerful, and picked up bits of seaweed, and played with shells! I say nothing of the moral aspect of it all, because if you once bring that in there is no question any more about the matter, since in one case we are brave, and in the other merely cowardly. But given that we are shipwrecked, that the sea of hungry death surrounds us, and will soon pick us off, how much better, on the lowest possible view of the affair, to play about, to be kind and gentle, even if to-morrow there will be an end of us, utterly and for ever!

'Yes, I am using beautiful language too. But I am talking of beautiful things.

'Well, that view is the silliest and most incomprehensible possible. How did we get on this absurd rock, if only death surrounds us? Did we come from death into life? That is impossible, since scientifically you can't produce life out of dead things. Or did some ship founder on the sea of death, and did we swim to shore, where we shall live until a wave sweeps us off again? That is possible; but, then, what was that ship on which we once were passengers, that for a time anyhow, until it foun-

dered, if it did founder, rode over these waves? That is a serious question, but there is only one answer to it. The ship must have been life in some form. But the image does not seem convincing, does it?

'What is left, then? Only this, that the sea which surrounds us on our little rock is not death at all, but life. Just as some day without doubt a wave will sweep us off our rock again, so there is no doubt that once a wave of that sea put us on the rock where you and I now are. If there is a wreck at all, it is a land-wreck, a wreck that puts us on shore. From the great sea of life we have been washed up for a little moment on to our little rock. Soon we shall be received back into life again!

'In the interval, though in a new sense we are wrecked, how interesting is our rock, and how full of dear people, and pink shells, and divine things of the sea that life, not death, casts up round us, and nourishes by the spent water of its waves! How utterly idiotic it would be not to collect them eagerly, these little bits, for when we go back into life we shall see the forests from which they come, the sapphire caves in which they really dwell. A little bit of life, that grouse that the eagles ate, was cast up close to you to-day. I shall particularly ask, when the wave takes me off again, where it came from. And I shall go and see the place. And certainly I shall see Mistress Eagle come back.'

Courage, huge, natural courage like this, absolutely unassumed, absolutely instinctive, may have

one of two effects on the beholder of it. It may make him weep for the admiration of it, or it may make him laugh out of joyousness of heart for the same admiration. At least I laughed.

'Oh, be sure to show me the place when I come,' I said. 'I am certain that Mistress Eagle will have a nice house.'

'They all have,' she said. 'There are many mansions.'

She looked at me in silence a moment.

'But I was not so certain of all these things when first I knew that I was so soon to see them all,' she said. 'At first, though I was never exactly frightened, I was dazed and stunned. I saw nothing clearly. I must use another image for that, and say that days passed as one sees the landscape pass through a railway-carriage window which is blurred by rain. I could see nothing clearly; it was all dim and rain-streaked. But then, without any conscious effort on my part, except perhaps a little exercise of patience, we passed—the train and I—out of the scud again, and soon the glass cleared, and I saw the green valleys and the sunny hillside just as they had always been.'

Again she paused.

'I have not told you anything of importance yet,' she said; 'all I have said is really quite obvious. But this now——

'You think of Pan as the smiling face that peeps from the fern, the presence that assures all suffering things that he is kind when he pipes to them, even though the sound means death. But surely that is

no more than a sort of pagan mythical aspect of him. I always think that he suffers too, that every pain which he seems to inflict is only the reflection of the pain in his own universal heart, although he still smiles. It is from the cross that He smiles at us all.'

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

THE 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' has indeed been a close bosom friend of the maturing sun, and for the last three days before Legs went back to his crammer in town, he, Helen, and I spent a prostrated existence. Heat that in July invigorates, is utterly intolerable if it occurs at the end of September, just as the crisp winter day, which would be so welcome in January, descending to the earth as it usually does in June, produces merely amazed horror at the weather, and probably a cold. The superficial view that we suffer because we are improperly clad for these climatic surprises (a view that Helen put forward the other night) is beside the point. During these days, if I was improperly clad, it was only because I had so little on. In fact, only ten minutes before she had said as much.

The state of Legs' affections, I am bound to add, aggravated the sultriness of the weather, and made me feel exactly 350 (three hundred and fifty) years old. To take it at its best, he was embarked on a violent flirtation with a dreadful girl; to take it at its worst, he was falling in love with her. She is the daughter of a neighbouring minute squire, who owns three turnip-fields, and calls it shooting. Legs shot

over it the other day, and after walking over the whole estate twice, got back to The Grange in time for lunch. This was before I returned from Scotland, or I should have tried to prevent it. Probably I should not have succeeded.

The neighbouring squire's name is Ampthump. I know quite well that it is not his fault, but that, wedded to what he is and a German wife, makes me unable to like him. His wife makes incredible quantities of jam, which, again, is an innocent pursuit; and Charlotte, the daughter, talks German to Legs, who I wish was more like Goethe. The whole family, in fact, as may have been already perceived, appear to me to be simply intolerable.

The attachment also has already led to equivocation on the part of Legs. He pretends that he talks to Charlotte because it is so good for his German. He knows that it is not so, and I know it is not so, and I think he knows that I know it is not so. But it really looks at the moment that unless they marry each other there will be a broken or, at any rate, a cracked heart. I only hope it will not be Legs'. I don't care the least what happens to Charlotte's heart. It may, however, be only a flirtation, in which case there probably will not even be a crack. Legs will wake up one morning, and after handling some precious withered flowers will wonder what on earth they ever meant to him, and throw them in the fire. Or Charlotte will do something equally desperate. That is my hope; my fear is that they are falling in love with each other.

This narrative, it should be understood, is the gist of what I have been saying fragmentarily to Helen. She considers it a cynical view, which alarms me, since I hold the creed that all cynics are properly and irretrievably damned. To-night Legs went to bed early, with dishevelled hair, a wakeful eye, and a gale of sighs, and I came upstairs to talk to Helen about it all while she brushed her hair.

'You are quite ridiculous about it,' she said. 'Because you happen not to like the Ampses (we have agreed on that abbreviation), you think that they are unlovable. Legs has proved the contrary. Besides, what on earth does her name matter, if she is going to change it?'

I groaned intentionally, and in a graveyard manner.

'Do you mean that you think Legs is in love with her?' I asked.

'Yes; at least, I hope so. He had a long talk with me to-day. He said he felt it was time he settled down. What a darling! Just twenty! I wish I was.'

Most of this was irrelevant. I tried to pick out pieces that were not.

'Of course, her name doesn't matter,' I said. 'Her name might be—— Well, you can't do worse than Ampthump, and it does happen to be exactly that. But her face is like a ham——'

'That is superficial,' said Helen. 'Beside, it isn't. It's oval.'

'So is a ham. And she's a prig. Ampthump! Good Lord!'

I am afraid I shouted this, because she said: 'Hush! Legs will hear.'

'Not he. Or if he does, he will think it is only the wind whispering the beloved name.'

'Yes, but you didn't whisper it. Oh, do take the brush. You made me send my maid away, so you must do it yourself. I can't brush from here, because my arms are in front.'

Now in my heart I pity everybody who has not seen Helen with her hair down. All such folk, in all their millions, lead impoverished existences. There is a wave in it that is like the big unbroken billows which succeed a storm, when the clouds have passed and the sun shines. It is lit from within, even as they seem to be irradiated from the depths. Those billows must go over a sandy foreshore, for they are yellow, and the sun—I know not how—must be foggy, for there is a little red light in them. And brushing, as I did now, I held my hand over them, and the hair rose to it with a tiny cracking sound. Her hair came to my hand, lifted towards it that unminted gold that framed her face, and covered her ears. And for a little while it was no wonder that I forgot about Legs and his Charlotte.

I suppose everybody knows the sensation of being lost. You can be lost all by yourself, as I was once, as I have said, in the western desert of Egypt, on which occasion the bray of a donkey was to me the trumpet of the Seraphin. That was a dreadful experience, since it implied being out of touch with

life. But I should be glad to know if there is anything the world holds which is more enraptured than the sense of being lost with one other person, to feel the world swim away, and be dissolved, so that you and the comrade you are with are quite alone. To feel that there is no existence except the existence of her who is lost with you. . . . It was Helen's hair.

'That's the world's side; there's the wonder!' That lover understood. Everyone saw Helen's hair.

> '"But the best is when I glide from out them,
> Cross a step or two of dubious moonshine,
> Come out on the other side. . . ."'

I never could quote correctly. The point is that the beloved has another face, the face she turns to her lover. No one else sees it; it is 'blind to Keats, him even.'

A moment ago I thought that no one but me must see Helen's hair. Now let them all see it, the waves of the sunlit sea, not breaking, unless the break be where I put my hand an inch above them.

'Thanks, dear,' she said soon. 'You brush it much better than my maid. Now shall we talk for five minutes? Then I must go to bed.'

I had hideous accumulations of various fag-ends of work to do, and at the end of the five minutes, or it might be ten, I went downstairs again, to begin at any rate this dreadful patchwork of odds and ends. It was still, I was almost sorry to observe, only just eleven, and since I had with both eyes open deliberately and firmly wasted all the hours of the day, my uneasy Conscience told me that I had

better, if it was to have the ease it craved, not think of leaving my chair for a couple of hours at least. I argued this point with it, and lost some minutes, for I told it that it was extremely bad for me to work at night, that it took more out of one than work in the day, that work done under these circumstances was never good work, that doctors recommended one never to work at night, but go peacefully to bed before the evening fever—whatever that might be—set in. Then there ensued a short spirited dialogue.

'Most sensible,' said Conscience. 'Give me your word that you will get up at six to-morrow, then, and work for two hours before breakfast, and you have my leave to go to bed now.'

'But I shan't wake at six,' said I, 'and the servants have gone to bed.'

'I will wake you,' said Conscience. (Conscience is quite capable of the odious feat.)

'But I can't work before breakfast,' I said. 'It makes me feel'—I could not think of the word for the moment—'oh yes, faint.'

'Well, feel faint, then,' said Conscience.

'But I would sooner not; it implies weakness of the heart.'

'Not to do your work implies weakness of character.'

'Shut up,' said I, 'and let me begin, then.'

And I could swear that my Conscience gave a self-satisfied chuckle.

For an hour I waded wearily, knee-deep only, so to speak, in work, like a man who wants to swim, but has to trudge out over level sands. Most

people, I fancy, even the laziest of us, like working, when we get up to our necks, or, better even, out of our depths, in it, but the wading is weary work. The worst of it was that the fact that I had to wade so far was entirely my own fault, for the whole of the last week I had never taken the trouble to finish up any one job, and now there waited for me several bills to pay, since a few mornings ago I had sat down to pay bills, and had paid them all except two or three; several letters to write, all of which had to begin either falsely (*i.e.*, 'I have just found your letter of the 17th'), or apologetically (*i.e.*, 'I haven't answered your letter before because——'). Then there was a half-corrected proof of an unfinished article, badly written originally, and, what is more, written without conviction. It was on a subject that did not particularly interest me, and I had only written it because the misguided editor of a magazine had offered me £25 for it, and I very much wished to buy a seal-top spoon which cost exactly that sum, and which I knew perfectly well I had no right to buy. So, saying to myself that I would write this article (which I should not otherwise have done), I had bought it, and here was the dismal price that I had to pay for it—namely, that this wretched article was a piece of literary dishonesty. I had to fudge and vamp over it, trying to conceal the nakedness of the land by ornamental expressions. That was brought home to me now. It was all bad cheap stuff, and though most of us are continually turning out bad cheap stuff, not knowing it is bad and cheap, such manufactures become

criminal when we do know it. As long as work is honest from the workman's point of view, it is only his misfortune when he does not know its valuelessness; but when he does know its valuelessness, he sins by intention, and is a forger. I was one, and by my forgery I had bought a seal-top that was not. I thought that when I tacitly agreed to work for two hours to-night, my tiresome Conscience would put its head under its wing, and leave me alone, but I found now that it was broad awake again, and chirping like a canary.

'What are you going to do?' it chirped. 'Are you going to send out a rotten forgery which everybody who knows anything will detect? or are you going to tear it up, and be left with a purchase that you know you can't really afford? Remember that you must get a new dining-room carpet too; you promised Helen you would. Chirp, chirp, chirp!'

I am bound to say that this enraged me.

'What's the use of making that row?' I said. 'It's you, Conscience, who has to settle.'

'I haven't the slightest idea,' said Conscience. 'It's your fault; you wouldn't listen to me when I told you that you had no right to accept £25 for your dreadful article.'

'You didn't say it so loud, then,' said I.

'No, but you heard all right,' said Conscience.

'I hardly heard,' said I. 'You spoke so indistinctly.'

'Yes, but you did hear,' it chirped, with a sort of devilish cheerfulness. 'You knew quite well what I meant. Now you suffer for it. Hurrah!'

I wonder if I am cursed in this matter of Conscience beyond the majority of mankind. Often and often (I will swear to this in the House of Lords if necessary) my Conscience is hardly audible at all at the time when I do anything which I ought not to do, or omit to do anything which I ought. To continue the simile of the canary, which really fits the case, when the actual choice comes, it is as if the canary had a thick green-baize cover round its cage, and only hoarse and muffled notes reach me. Very often, indeed, I am sorry to say, I don't attend to them, or say it is only the cat, and in consequence do what I should not. Then the moment it is done the baize cover is whisked off, and the infernal and cheerful chirping, or so it sounds, succeeds to the wrong choice or the weak omission. And the burden of the chirping is always the same.

'I told you so; I told you so. Now you are in a mess! What are you going to do now? Chirp, chirp, chirp!'

And a hurricane of dry and deafening notes follows.

I sat there with this column of stupid twaddle in my hands, and Conscience watched me with its bright bird-like eye. Much as I like birds, I hate their eyes, because they remind me of Conscience. They are beady and absolutely unsympathetic, frightfully quick to see, and without a particle of pity in them. Conscience never pities one at all; it is the foe that is of a man's household. It always gloats over one's mistakes, and things that are more than mistakes, and only says:

'Here comes the master with the whip. A new lash, I see, this time. And what a thin shirt you have got on!'

Nor, when the whipping is over, does Conscience sympathize.

'I told you so; I told you so,' it says. 'No, there is no soothing ointment of any kind in the house. I ate it all up. Wasn't that a beautiful new lash?'

Well, I tore that dreadful nonsense up, and wrote another apologetic letter. I am getting quite good at them. But to-morrow—this is what makes Conscience mad—I shall tell Helen about it. The telling is not pleasant; it never is. But as soon as Helen knows, Conscience has simply to retire. It does not understand why it suddenly becomes so unimportant, and that gives it a fit of impotent rage. Nor do I quite understand, though I am nearer to the explanation than Conscience is. But she understands. At least, I suppose so, or else she would not be able to put the green-baize cover on again.

And then, what with apologetic letters, and the drawing of two or three cheques, and the stupid attempts, in this matter of the dishonest article, to produce something out of nothing, by covering up the nothingness by more ornamental expressions, and the eventual destruction of it all, I found that the two hours were gone, and that I had kept my promise to the idiotic canary. It had ceased chirping from experience when I told it I was going to confess to Helen.

The night was intensely hot, and through the long open windows of the room in which I had been working no breeze entered. Though September had but a quarter more of its course to run, it was like some sultry July midnight, portending storm, for when I went out to take the night-breath the sky was thickly overcast, so that no direct ray, either of moonlight or of starshine, came earthwards. The serrated outline of the elms at the end of the lawn was scarce distinguishable against the scape of the clouds, and the low land of the water-meadows was blanketed in a mist that was only just visible by its whiteness against the black blot of the hills behind. Fifi, who had very sensibly decided to sleep on the veranda, did not stir when I came out, though I heard the instinctive thump of her short tail on the tiles, the natural politeness of the dear dog, though she really could not stand on ceremony with me to the length of getting up. So, maliciously, I am afraid, since I thought this slightly cavalier conduct, I said ' Puss,' though there was no Puss of any sort, as far as I was aware. But my malice was again thwarted, for Fifi just tapped again with her tail, in courteous recognition of a stale old joke, just to show that she appreciated my intention, but she made not the smallest further effort towards activity.

So she was half asleep, and all the world, this dear, blessed world, which is so full of merriness and simple, innocent pleasure, despite the fulminations of fashionable priests, was quite asleep, not stirring, scarcely breathing, just sleeping, sleeping.

A REAPING

It was not yet the hour when, just before the hold of the night begins to tremble and be weakened in the sky, all living things wake for a moment—that mysterious moment, when sheep take a bite of grass, and cows twitch their grave ears, and horses stand up for a minute before they settle down to the light morning sleep which dissolves with day, and when even indoors, if you sleep with a dog in your room, and happen yourself to be awake, you will hear a stretching of limbs on your bed or on the carpet, and a long sigh breathed into the blankets. Plants and flowers, so I truly believe, feel the same thing; and though there may be no wind perceptible to you if you are abroad, as sometimes I am, at that hour, you will hear, just at the moment when cattle move and sheep take their bite of grass, a stir go through the trees, and a hushed whisper lisp in the flower-beds. At that moment, too (you need not credit this, though it is absolutely true), though it has rained all night till then, and will rain thereafter, steadily, soakingly till morning, the rain ceases, as suddenly as if a tap was turned off. Time and again I have tested that.

But, as I have said, that mysterious moment was not due yet. It was still two hours short of it, and everything was still asleep. Even in the last minute or two Fifi had fallen fast asleep, too, after I had sat down in a wicker chair on the veranda, for when I called her, there was no tap of response. To-night, too, the sleep of the world seemed to me (feeling it as one does by that sixth sense, which still exists dormant in us, and is most awake at night)

to be extraordinarily deep. It was the sleep of a world that was very tired with this long hot summer. There seemed no pulse stirring in it at all, as you may find it stir in the light sleep in which Nature indulges in June, or still more in the dark, wet nights of spring, when the secret boiling up of life begins again from hidden root to budding tendril, so that if you lay your ear to the trunk of a tree it seems that the effervescence of the young year is audible, and sings within it, even as the telegraph poles are resonant with the wind that hums in the wires. Nor could I hear, when I rose and walked across the lawn, even though the dew was heavy on the grass, the hiss of startled worms, withdrawing from the approaching footfall. Black, too, and lifeless, was the oblong of the house except where the lights burned in the room in which I had been trying to be honest. The long herbaceous hedge was black, the lawn was black, Helen's windows and Legs' were black.

I went back to the seat I had just left, and lit a cigarette, meaning to go upstairs to bed when I had smoked it. Fifi still lay motionless, though generally any excursion into the garden at any time of day or night sets her scampering. And then, quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly, for nothing was farther from my thoughts, I became aware that, though the physical world was asleep, there was some enormous stir and activity going on in the occult world which surrounds and permeates us. Yet that is perhaps a wrong expression, for the same activity and stir always goes on in that unsleeping

realm ; and I must express it more accurately by saying that the part of me which was able to perceive it was suddenly quickened. It is quite possible, of course, since I confess to being able to go to sleep whenever I choose, and often, without delay, when I do not, that at that moment I fell asleep. But whether I fell asleep or not, does not make the slightest difference, for there was clearly some part of my brain awake, and it made my eyes think that they saw, and my ears think that they heard that which immediately followed.

As far as I am aware, in any case, I sat down again in a rather creaky basket-chair and lit a cigarette. The match with which I lit it, I threw on to the gravel path in front of me, and, since I required it no further, it proceeded to burn prosperously. By its light I could see Fifi with her nose between her paws. I saw, also, that my shoelace was untied.

And then I heard my name called from the garden, in a voice that was perfectly familiar to me, though for the moment I could not say, so elusive is the ear, whose voice it was that called. It was not Helen's, it was not Legs', it was not . . . and then I remembered whose voice it was. It called me by name, once only, in the voice that had said, ' It is from the cross that He smiles at us all.'

I do not think I was frightened, but simply for the purely personal reason that to me there was nothing to be frightened at. The match still burned on the gravel path, so short had been the measurement of this in the world of time, and I could still see

Fifi's nose buried between her paws. Then she raised it, looked out into the garden with terrified scrutinizing eyes, focussing them on something invisible to me, and gave one long howl. But there was no moon. It was at something else she howled.

Then, I confess, as if some bomb had burst within me, terror flooded my whole mind, submerging it, and I sprang up. Simultaneously I heard a sort of strangled scream from the room above, and the scurry of unshod feet overhead. Next moment the sound of an opening door came to my ears, and a quick stumbling tread on the stairs. I ran indoors, and reached the door leading from my room into the hall, just as the handle of it was seized and shaken by someone on the other side of it, and Legs burst into the room, his hair all tumbled and erect, and his face wearing such a mask of terror that for the moment I recognized him only because it must be he.

'Who is that in the garden?' he said. 'Someone in white, who looked up at my window? And Fifi howled at her.'

This would never do. Nerves, terror are the most infectious things in the world, and unless I took steps, there would, I knew, be standing here two babbling lunatics.

'I was dozing in the veranda,' I said, 'and Fifi woke me by howling. She woke you, too! Legs, don't be an ass! Pull yourself together. If there had been anything, I should have seen it.'

Legs was as white as a sheet. The whiteness somehow showed through his freckled sun-tanned

skin. He was swaying to and fro on his feet, as if he would fall, and I put my arm round him, and deposited him in a chair. Then I poured out a wineglassful of neat whisky.

'Don't speak another word till you have drunk that,' I said. 'Then I shall count ten slowly, and then you may speak.'

Fifi had followed me in, and sat close to the door whimpering. With my heart in my mouth and a perspiring forehead, I went across to the window as I counted, shut and locked it, and pulled down the blind.

'Nine, ten,' I said.

A little colour had begun to come back to Legs' face. He had drunk the whisky, a beverage which he detested, like water, and the frozen fear of his eyes was less biting. And then, as suddenly as it had come on, my terror left me. Whatever it was that I had heard, whatever it was that Legs had seen and Fifi perceived, there was nothing to terrify. Besides, within myself, now that the cowardly disorder of my nerves had passed, I believed I knew what it was that had made its presence so strangely perceived by us all. The mortal suffering of a dear friend was over. Already I was ashamed of having told Legs that I had been asleep and had neither seen nor heard anything.

'Legs, I lied just now,' I said. 'I heard my name called from the garden in Margaret's voice.'

'You mean she is dead?' asked he gently. 'The last accounts had been better, I thought.'

'I am sure she is.'

Then for a moment, like a sudden squall, the white terror passed over Legs' face again.

'It was not her I saw,' he said hoarsely; 'it was Death. I thought she had come for me. Fifi saw her too.'

I sat down on the arm of his chair.

'Yes, old boy,' I said, 'I think that you and Fifi both saw some manifestation of what I heard. But there is nothing to be frightened at. But how was it you were at your window? You had gone to bed hours ago.'

'I know, but I couldn't sleep, so I got up and sat by the window.'

We sat there for some time after that, and by degrees Legs recovered from his collapse, and soon, instead of terror, mere sleepiness invaded his face. Once or twice he stifled a yawn, and at length he got up.

'I am dead sleepy,' he said. 'I think I shall go to bed.'

'You are not frightened any longer, are you?' I asked.

Legs looked at me out of drooping eyelids, and he seemed puzzled.

'Frightened? What about?' he said. 'Good-night.'

I was very late down next morning, and found that Helen and Legs had nearly finished breakfast. As I came in, he jumped up.

'Ah, here he is!' he cried. 'Now, did you sit up very late last night?'

When he asked that I began to have some suspicion of what was coming next.

'Yes, very. Why?'

'Well, were you talking to yourself? Helen and I both woke in the night, and heard talking in your room. I had had some dream that frightened me, and I nearly came downstairs for human companionship.'

'Why didn't you?'

'I was too sleepy. But—where you talking?'

'No. You were dreaming. So was Helen. I may have groaned now and then over proofs, but not more than that.'

Legs nodded at Helen.

'I told you it was ghosts,' he said.

'And you heard voices too?' I asked Helen.

'Yes; at least, I thought so. But I was very sleepy. I thought also I heard Fifi howl.'

So, you see, there is no corroboration of my story, and if I dreamed it all, or made it up, there is no one to whom I can appeal for confirmation of its verity. But there is just this little bit of evidence—namely, that though Legs had finished breakfast, he went on drinking cup after cup of tea. When Helen left us he explained this to me.

'I woke with a mouth like a lime-kiln,' he said—'just as if I had been drinking that dreadful whisky of yours. I drank most of my jug, too, and they had to bring me more water to wash in.'

What happened last night, then, had been wiped clean off Legs' brain again. Whatever it was that he had seen, that which made him stumble white-faced downstairs, had gone. But an hour or two later, while we were out playing croquet in the garden, some faint echo of it, I think, crossed him again. A telegram was brought out for me, which contained what I knew it would contain, and I handed it to him when I had read it. Then we went quietly indoors.

Just as we got into my room again, he said :

' How odd that sensation is of feeling that something has happened before. When you handed me the telegram, I felt I knew what was in it. And during the last week she had been rather better, had she not ?'

OCTOBER

OCTOBER

THE business of the dining-room carpet (a case of conscience makes the whole world kin, so I confidently return to this matter) was settled more beautifully than I had thought possible. I told Helen all about it, and she said :

' Thank goodness you tore the thing up ! Dear, you *are* such a silly ass ! There's nothing whatever more to be said. You are, aren't you ?'

' There's nothing more to be said, I believe you remarked.'

' Well, you may just say " Yes," ' said she.

So I said ' Yes.' It was a variant of the woman's last word, spoken by a man instead.

' There, now we'll go and quarrel about the rose-garden,' said she.

We went and quarrelled. She was flushed with triumph over making me say ' Yes,' and in consequence I got my way about several disputed points, which to-day the darling thinks she chose herself.

The rose-garden is a design of unparalleled audacity, and when it grows up, it will be nothing short of stupendous. For between us Helen and I are territorial magnates, and beyond this house and garden, which are hers, I am owner of two fields, and limitless possibilities. I bought them a year ago,

in a sudden flush of extravagance, and for six months we maintained there (at staggering loss) a poultry-yard in one corner and a cow over the rest. The original design, of course, was to make a sound investment in land, which, in addition to the fathomless pleasure of owning it, would keep us in butter, eggs, chickens to eat (not to mention, as I hasten to do, savouries of chicken liver on toast), and possibly beef. If one considers the question closely, it is difficult to see how a cow can (1) give milk, and (2) give beef; but Helen, in visionary enthusiasm, said we should have oxen as well, and why not pigs in the farther corner? I did not at once see why not, and I bought the two fields with the same unconcern as I should have bought a box of matches, which yield so sure an enjoyment in the matter of lighting cigarettes.

Then we both began to learn that, though we might be gardeners, we were not farmers. The poultry-yard was (mistakenly, no doubt) erected at the corner of the field nearest the house, and morning after morning we were awakened at dead and timeless hours. Helen said that when a hen made a long clucking noise, it meant she had laid an egg, and that, till the thing became incredible, consoled me. For if she was right, it was clear that hens laid invisible eggs, or that they were doing tiresome conjuring tricks, and that the long-drawn crow meant, 'I have laid an egg, but see if you can find it. I am the mother of this disappearing egg.' We usually were not able to do so, but sometimes an egg was found in a hedge, or in a ditch, which

when found was totally uneatable, except by the Chinese. Personally, I believe that by some unhappy mischance we had bought celibate and barren poultry, whose customs drove us daily nearer Bedlam; in fact, it was the pig that was our hellebore.

The pig was not a pig, but a sow. She went mad, too—or so I must believe—jumped the pigsty in the opposite corner, made a bee-line for the poultry-yard, went through our beautiful wire-fencing as if it had been a paper hoop in a circus, and ate two hens. The cock beat a masterly retreat, and was never heard of again. The other four hens followed him. And the sow, dripping with gore, lay down in the hen-house and slept. Almost before she woke, she was sold for a song.

Then the cow came. I do not wish to libel her, but I think I may safely say that she was milkless and excitable, and had a wild eye. She roamed over my fields (mine, I had bought them) as if they were her own. Had not Legs been so agile and swift, she might have tossed him. As it was, she ran into the brick wall at the lower end of the garden, and made her nose bleed. As far as I know, that was the only liquor that she parted with. She was probably mad also, for she used to low in the middle of the night, when all proper cows are fast asleep. Asleep or awake, however, now she makes her fantasias elsewhere. I almost hope she is dead, for it requires a larger optimism than I possess to believe that she will ever become a proper cow, for she was more of a steed for Mazeppa. Perhaps she was a horse after all, a horned horse. I wish

we had thought of that at the time. As it was, we sold her at outrageous loss, as a cow. And with her we parted with any idea of keeping farmyard animals for purposes of gain. Perhaps we were not serious enough about it, and the animals saw that.

Through last spring and summer the fields rested after this invasion of outrageous animals, and about the middle of May it struck Helen and me simultaneously that we were going to have a crop of hay. That was delightful, and much less harassing than hens. Hay would not wake one at timeless hours, nor would it go mad, and have to be sold at a quarter of the price we gave for it, since we gave nothing for it at all. It was the pound of tea thrown in with the fields we had bought, or the *Times* newspaper thrown in with your subscription to that extraordinary library.

From this there was born the scheme of giving a haymaking party, to which we originally planned to ask everybody we knew, amended that to asking all the children we knew, and afterwards (this was Helen's amendment) decided not to ask anybody at all, partly because children were so serious, but chiefly because there might not be enough hay to go round. We neither of us knew how many square yards of hay it was reasonable to supply to each person, and it would be dreadful if there was not enough. Either Helen or I, or both of us, would have to go without, and it was safer to give the haymaking party to each other. We were in town all May, and the first half of June, but had left word

with the gardener to send us a postcard when the hay was ready. The weather throughout these weeks was gloriously sunny, and in our mind's eye we saw the crop growing taller and thicker with each blazing day.

Then one evening came the memorable postcard : ' A reddy.'

We flew to the ' A.' In the middle of the largest field was a small haycock like a penwiper. One not quite so large and round at the top, more like a pincushion, was visible in the next field.

It was clear after this that the Powers that Are willed that our fields should not be used for utilitarian purposes. Hence the inception of the rose-garden.

A brick wall (the one against which the insane cow had blooded her nose) bounded the garden. From there the ground declined steeply away into the middle of the larger field, which was cup-shaped, the ground rising on all sides of it. (It was at the centre of the cup, where the sugar is, that the penwiper had been raked together.) To-day a flight of steps made of broken paving-stones—an entrancing material—led down the side of the cup from the garden-gate, and up the opposite slope. Standing where the sugar is, therefore, you saw on every side of you rising ground, which had been terraced, and walks of broken paving-stone, communicating with the two staircases, lay concentrically round. And the Herculean labour which had already occupied us so many rapturous afternoons was to plant the whole cup with rose-trees, so that, standing in

the centre, there was nothing visible except sky and roses. That was practically done ; and to-day what occupied us was the consideration of the level remainder of the field, of which there was some half-acre. It was rough, coarse grass, starred with dandelion, which gave the first hint. We wanted to get rid of the dandelion, and——

At last I got Helen to agree, and I mixed together in a wheelbarrow an infinity of bulbs, and other delectable roots. There were big onion-like daffodils, neat crocuses with an impatient little yellow horn sticking up, fritillary roots, bottle-shaped tulips, the corms of anemones, and the orris of the iris. Then, trowel in hand, each with a bag of bulbs taken haphazard out of the wheelbarrow and with a bag of sand to make a delectable sprouting-place for the roots, we started. Every dandelion encountered was to be dug up with honesty and thoroughness, and where the dandelion had been there was to be planted a bulb taken at random out of the bag. Helen said it would take ten years. Personally, when I looked, I thought longer, but I did not say so, for I practise reticence on discouraging occasions.

I wonder how many people know the extraordinary delight of doing a thing for oneself, starting from the beginning. I do not say that it gives me the smallest pleasure to black my boots or brush my clothes, since somebody has already made those boots and woven the cloth. But there is nothing more entrancing than to deal first-hand with Nature, to make holes in the earth, and put in them roots, the farthest back that we can go with regard to vege-

table life. Rightly or wrongly, it seems to me a pleasure as clean and as elemental as the joy of creation itself. Whether we write a book, or paint a picture, or carve a statue, we, though we do not really create, but only arrange what is in existence already, are going back as far as we can, taking just the root-thoughts and translating them to song or shape. And though we do not really create at all, but only use and arrange, as I have said, the already existing facts of the world, passing them, it may be, through the crucible of the mind, we get quite as near to Nature, if not nearer, when we go a-bulb-planting. The bulbs are our thoughts, our pigments, what you will, and when in spring-time we shall see them making a meadow of Fra Angelico, it will be because we have actually planted these things ourselves that the joy of creation will be ours. Not to do that would be as if an artist laid no brush on the canvas himself, but merely dictated to a dependent where such a colour should be spread. But given that he had a slave so intelligent and so obedient that he could follow to a hair's-breadth the directions given him, can you imagine the artist feeling the possessive joy of creation in the result, even though it realized the conception to the uttermost? Not I; nor, in the garden, do I care, like that, to see what others have done. It is not sufficient to direct; one has to do it oneself.

I love, too, and cannot conceive not loving, getting hot and dirty over the wrestling with the clean, black earth. A great deal of nonsense is talked about the dignity of labour, but it is chiefly

talked by those whose labour lies indoors, who, excellent craftsmen as they may be, go spudding about in the intangible realms of the mind. I doubt, indeed, whether any market-gardener has ever spoken of the dignity of labour. We leave that to those who only know it by repute. But I long to put down the manner of the transaction. I do not in the least think it dignified, but it is such fun.

The green had mostly faded from the grass, leaving the meadow, as is always the case in October, far more grey than green. Certain plants, however, were still of varnished brightness, and the dandelion leaf was one. There was no need to pick and choose, and without moving a step, I dug the trowel down into the earth, loosened it all round the vegetable enemy, and lifted it. An ominous muffled snap came from inches down in the earth, which I tried to pretend I had not heard. But one could not cheat the eye also. There, at the bottom of my excavation, was a milky root, showing a danger-signal of white against the brown loam. I had to go deeper yet : the whole of the tap-root must be exhumed. Another dig, another snap, a raw-looking worm recoiled from the trowel, only just in time, and eventually up came the remotest fibre. How good the earth smelt ! How reeking with the life of the world ! Cold, clammy, rich earth, ever drawn upon by the needs of the Bank of Life, ever renewed by that which life paid back to it. A thousand years had gone to the formation of my trowelful, and a few inches below was the chalk,

where a million lives a million years ago had spent themselves on the square inch of it. Slowly, by work of the myriad sea-beasts, this shoulder of chalk was heaved from the sea, the myriad lives became a myriad myriad, and here I had the little lump of chalk borne up on the end of the trowel which told of the labourers of the unnumbered years. Then, in a spoonful of sand, I put the sign, the evidence of another decade of millions on the top of them, and stuck thereon an onion-like daffodil root that was born last year. In a fortnight's time that child of to-day will have reached downwards, feeling with delicate, pleased touch the sand of a thousand years ago, will delve through the time of the pyramids of Egypt, will draw moisture from the chalk that was old when our computation of time was not yet born, and will blossom next April, feeding its sap on the primeval years. And for what? To make Helen and Legs and me say, 'Oh, what a beautiful Horsfeldii!' Then we shall look at the fritillary that prospers a yard away.

The eternal romance of it all! To the right-minded there is nothing that is not a fairy-story. Like children, we crowd round the knees of the wonderful teller of it, and say, 'Is it true? Is it all true?' And He can't tell lies. Sometimes, when we have a sort of moral toothache, we sit apart, and sniff. We say that scientifically we have proved there is no God. So said the fool in his heart. But nowadays the fools write it down in their damned books, and correct the proofs of it, and choose the bindings of it, and read, with gusto, the thoughtful reviews of

it. And, God forgive them, they think they are very clever people, if I may be excused for mentioning them at all.

But fairy-stories ! How surprising and entrancing are even those which people make up and put in books, while round us every day a fairy-story far more wonderful is being told not only for us to read, but enacted for us to see. It is only familiarity with it which robs us of the sense of its wonder, for imagine, if we could make ourselves ignorant again of what happens to bulbs when we put them in the earth, how the possibilities of flying-machines would grow flat and stale before the opening of the daffodil. For a man's capacity for happiness is in great measure the same as his capacity for wonder and interest, and considering that there is absolutely nothing round us which does not teem with wonder if only we had the sense to see it, it argues very ill for our——

A wild shriek from the hillside opposite (distance forty yards) interrupted me.

' I didn't mean to,' cried Helen ; ' but I cut a centipede in half. They are going in opposite directions.'

' Dig another hole !' I shouted. ' Then go back when the halves have gone away. Yes, very distressing, but you can't avoid everything.'

' Murderer !' said Helen.

This was feminine logic. I had not cut the centipede in half !

It was one of those golden October days of which we have now had some half-dozen. Every night there is a little frost, so that morning both looks

and smells exquisitely clean, and it is hardly possible to regret the turn of the year; though dahlias are blackened, the trees blaze with copper and gold, for in this week of windless days scarce a leaf has fallen, and the stems are as thick with foliage as they were in the summer, and to my mind doubly beautiful. And this work of bulb-planting seems to bridge over the winter, for we are already at work on spring. But in November, Helen and I mean to turn our faces townwards again, for it is possible there to be unaware of the transition to winter, which is so patently before one's eyes in the country, and which, with the best will in the world, it is impossible not to find rather depressing. Some people, I know, label the squalls of February and March as execrable, and flee the country then. But we both love them. These are the last despairing efforts of winter. His hand is already loosed from the earth; he strikes wildly, knowing that there are but few blows left in him. But in the autumn he is gaining strength every day: it is life whose hold is being loosed. And that is not exhilarating to watch. True, it is only a mimic death-bed, but personally we don't want to sit by the bedside. In London there is no bedside. The shorter the day, the earlier the lamps are lit. Those avenues of shining eyes, which are not shocked whatever they see. . . . And the fogs—the mysterious fogs! I suppose we are Cockneys.

Helen gave out first in the matter of bulbs, and came and sat by me.

'How very dirty you are!' she said. 'And have you been planting bulbs with your nose?'

'Not at present. But it tickled, and so I rubbed it.'

'Well, let's stop now. I want to go for a walk. My back aches with bending, and though I haven't got toothache, I feel as if I might have, and the kitchen-maid has given notice, and I don't think anybody loves me, and if Legs marries that awful girl, I will never speak to you again. And they are coming to dinner to-night! I pray Heaven that Legs may miss his train, and not get here till late.'

'So do I. Yes; let's go for a real tramp on the downs. Hadn't I better go and wash my face first?'

'Oh no; what does it matter? But are you sure you don't want to go on bulbing?'

'Quite sure. I think we won't go by the road, do you know. We can strike across the meadows and up the beacon.'

Helen gave a little purr—a querulous rumble of the throat.

'I have the blues,' she said, with great distinctness. 'I was as happy as possible till ten minutes ago, and then they came on like—like a thunderstorm. Everything ached. I groaned aloud: my mind hurt me like lumbago. It hurts still. Oh, do rub something on it.'

That is one of the heavenly things about Helen. If she 'feels bad,' she comes and tells me about it like a child. She scolds me for all sorts of things of which I am perfectly innocent, because she knows I don't mind one scrap (I love it, really, but I don't tell her that), and it makes her feel better. She

scolded now, even when we had passed the water-meadow and began a really steep ascent of the flanking hills.

'I knew the kitchen-maid wouldn't stop,' she said, 'because those London girls hate the country. So do I. And it was all your fault. You engaged her; I had nothing to do with it. And we never *had* such a kitchen-maid. She cooks better than the cook, and does everybody else's work as well. You might have known she wouldn't stand the country.'

'Go on,' said I. 'My fault entirely. So is the toothache, isn't it?'

'I haven't got one, but I might have. And that's your fault, too. I wanted to go to the dentist as I passed through London, and you persuaded me to come down here without stopping. It did ache just then—it did.'

The hill got rather steeper.

'Go on,' said I. 'How slowly you walk!'

'Yes, but I have to do all the talking. You have no conversation. Oh dear, what a devil I am! Aren't I?'

'Yes.'

'There! I told you nobody loved me. Oh, look! we are going to have a real red sunset. All the hills are getting molten, as if they were red-hot and glowing.'

She was feeling a little better—not much, but a little. We had come up the two hundred feet of steep down-side as if we had been storming a breach. To walk very fast up a hill makes all proper people feel better, unless they have heart disease, in which

case they die, and so, we hope, feel better also. But for those who have not heart disease, and want to feel better, the prescription is confidently recommended.

'And then that awful girl!' she went on. 'You insisted on being neighbourly, as you call it, with the Ampses, and this is the result.'

'There has been none at present.'

'No; but you tell me to ask the family to dinner on the very day that Legs comes down. Oh dear, what a heavenly evening! I should so enjoy it if everything wasn't wrong. Look at the sky! Fifty thousand little pink, fluffy angels floating about in it! Do you want to go right to the top of the hill?'

'Yes, right to the top. Then I shall begin to answer you back.'

Helen laughed.

'Oh no, don't,' she said. 'It is no fun plaguing you if you dispute my facts. So tell me quickly: isn't everything your fault, and not mine? Please pull me, if you intend to go that pace.'

So I pulled her, she holding the end of my stick, and we arrived at the very top of all. Sunset was below us, evening stars were above us, and on the huge expanse of down there was no one else. It was the loneliness I love.

'The devil has gone,' she said, after a while. 'You are rather nice to me. And I don't think I have toothache, and—well, you thought that Charlotte was a little Ampsy before I did. And even if nobody loves me—oh, how dirty your nose is!'

That was true, anyhow.

OCTOBER

An extraordinary phenomenon in country towns is that, though nobody has anything to do, everyone feels extremely busy, whereas in town, though you have got an enormous deal to do, you never feel busy at all, and can, without fail, find time for anything else. I think there must be some microbe which cannot live in London, but thrives elsewhere, which produces the illusion of being rushed. Personally, I know it well: it is not an old enemy of mine, nor is it an old friend, but it is a pleasant old humbug, which I am afraid I rather encourage. This evening, for instance, when I went to my room after tea, I encouraged it, and argued that one never had a moment to oneself. I had two hours in front of me now, as a matter of fact, in which I should be undisturbed; but the Old Humbug said that it was all very well to think about the future. All he knew was that he—that is, I—had been rushed—yes, rushed—all day and all yesterday, and ever since we came down to this dear, sleepy old town. To-day was Tuesday, and people were coming to dinner. We had gone out to lunch yesterday, and had dined out twice last week. Also, there was the garden to attend to, and a little golf (almost every day, as a matter of fact) was necessary for the health, and what with letters to write and cigarettes to smoke, and the Meistersinger overture to learn, in order to play it with Legs, I was a victim of this hurrying, bustling mode of life, which in a generation or so more would assuredly send everybody off their heads.

I made myself quite comfortable in my chair, and proceeded to think about it seriously, because I had two hours in front of me. It was all quite true (I was encouraging the Old Humbug, you will understand), and the modern mode of life was insane. London, anyhow, was insane, and in a little while I should probably get to agree with the Old Humbug that I was rushed and driven in the country also. But, to encourage credulity, I took London first. There one certainly was busy—all the hours, that is to say, of a day that began quite early and ended next morning were full, and I reconstructed one such as I often spend, and hope to spend many times more. I do not give it, because it seems to me the least edifying, and all stern moralists (the Old Humbug is an awfully stern moralist) would—as, indeed, they have done—shake their heads over it, and say, 'To what purpose?' I will tell you that afterwards.

I was called, let me say, at half-past seven, and after a few incredulous groans got up. I shaved, washed a little—not much, for reasons that will appear—drank some tea, and in a quarter of an hour was wildly bicycling towards the Park. When things flourished very much, and money flowed, Helen and I rode champing steeds; but just now things were what is called fluctuating, and I rode a bicycle, and she stayed in bed. An hour and a half of frantic pedalling on a hot June morning produces excellent physical results; and at half-past nine I was in the swimming-bath at the Bath Club, where I became cool and clean. I changed into another suit of flannels there, rode sedately home,

and had breakfast at precisely a quarter-past ten. By eleven I had eaten breakfast, read the *Daily Mail*, and smoked a cigarette, and was about to spend a quiet, studious morning until half-past one (for we were lunching out at two), when Helen came in.

'Do come to Lord's,' she said; 'it's Gentlemen and Players, and we can sit there till lunch. We can't go this afternoon, and you are playing golf at Woking to-morrow.'

'I can't. Not time.'

'Oh, just this once.'

Just this once, then, we went. It was too heavenly, and we were late for lunch.

It was one of the rather long lunches, and it was nearly four when we left the house. Then, as we had neither of us seen the Sargents at the Academy, we went there, since the afternoon was already gone, and got home about six; and as we had been given a box at the opera for 'Tristan,' which began at half-past seven, it was necessary to dine at half-past six—a terrible hour, but true. At the opera Legs picked Helen up to go to a ball, and I went home to answer my morning's post, which I had not yet read.

But, it will be objected, Gentlemen and Players, and the one necessary visit to the Academy, and 'Tristan' does not occur every day. Quite true; but something else always does, and the Old Humbug, who had got quite large and important during this short survey, said in those canting tones which I knew so well: 'You are wasting your life over this insensate rush and hurry. And you do no better down here. What have you done to-day?

Planted bulbs, and written two or three pages of your silly book. What will you do to-morrow? You won't even write your silly book, because you are going to play golf with Legs in the morning, and you say you can't work after lunch. And the days will make themselves into months, and the months into years' (here he dropped into poetry), 'and you will ever be a name of scorn—at least, you would if ten minutes after you were dead anybody remembered what your name was. But you will have gone to your account.'

Well, I join issue with the Old Humbug over this. For my part, I assert that it was perfectly right for me to go to the Gentlemen and Players, and to the opera, and to plant bulbs, and to play golf with Legs to-morrow morning if fine. And as for his objection to what he calls 'rush,' why, I fling it in his face, since I must rush. If I set apart a certain time every day for private meditation, I should be simply bored. I should get—I suppose this must be the proposed practical effect of the plan—no great and ennobling thoughts out of my solitary meditations, and instead of feeling that I had spent the morning to some serious purpose, I should feel, and I think rightly, that I had merely wasted it. But if I have planted bulbs all morning, I haven't wasted it. I will assert that on the Day of Judgment; for I have been busy walking along the path I feel sure I was meant to walk on. There are a thousand other paths all leading to the central and celestial light, and they are for other people to walk on. It would, of course, be a terrible waste of time

for one who by nature was a meditative recluse to go to the match between the Gentlemen and Players, or for a deaf man to go to 'Tristan,' or for a blind one to lie on his back and look at the filtering sunlight between the leaves of beech-trees in June. But the point for everybody is to get into touch with life as continually as he can, and at as many points as he can. This is gospel. I would I had the palate of a wine-taster to get into touch with life there; the prehensile toe and sense of balance of a tight-rope walker to get into touch there, the mathematical head of the astronomer to learn the orbit of a star that has never been seen, but only conjectured; or I wish very much indeed that I had the missionary spirit. Indeed, then I would go to the nearest cannibal islands and (probably a good thing, too) be cheerfully devoured; or, again, if I had it in a lesser degree, I would go and teach in the Sunday-school, and have a class for boys in the evening. I did try the Sunday-school when first I lived here, and for four unhallowed Sundays I passed a feverish hour surrounded by mystified infants and intolerable lithographs. You never saw such a failure as I was: I dreaded those hours so much that I thought my reason would be unhinged. And the children used to regard me, I am sure, as they would have regarded some queer, though harmless, creature of the menagerie. I couldn't do that sort of thing.

I neither made them happy nor could I teach them anything. That latter was quite proved when,

on the Sunday succeeding my fourth lesson, an Archdeacon came round and examined all the classes in turn. I think I shall never get over the nightmare horror of that scrutiny when he sat in my arm-chair at the desk, and I, the trembling instructor, stood by the side while he asked my idiot flock who Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were, and other really elementary things. One child said that Eve was God's wife, and I wished the earth might open and swallow me up. Then he came to the Catechism, and it really seemed as if nobody knew his own name. And it was for that nightmare that I had spent four feverish Sunday afternoons and a parody of days between, for every moment Sunday was coming nearer.

No; I give more happiness to Legs by being soundly beaten by him at golf, or by wasting (so says the Old Humbug) a morning in taking Helen up to Lord's to see the Gentlemen and Players. Also—I hasten to forestall criticism—I like it much better myself; and though you may, if you like, call it selfish, I hereby state that to like doing anything is a very good and Christian reason for doing it. Behold the gauntlet!

For we poor folk who really cannot teach in Sunday-schools, and are not employed in making discoveries which will alleviate painful diseases, and do not serve our constituency or our King, and sneakingly throw pamphlets about the Education Bill into the fire without reading them, because we know we don't actually care one pin what happens, and are in every single respect quite unsatisfactory

and useless and unornamental, have yet, somehow (there can be no doubt of this), to add if we can to the happiness, anyhow, of those dear folk among whom our lot has been so graciously cast. We have no great gifts of any description ; we are neither wise nor witty, and there has been only one talent given us, which is the power of enjoyment. Well, that is a very little one, you may say, and a very selfish one to cultivate, but if we have nothing else at all, had we not better try to make some use of that ?

For the fact remains that it can be made some use of. Everyone feels better for seeing one of these drones, who are neither soldiers, nor sailors, nor politicians, nor teachers, enjoy himself. Enjoyment in the air is like oxygen in the air : it quickens everybody, and in its way makes them happier. The poor drones can neither teach nor fight, nor make anybody good, but they can in their humdrum way make people a little more cheerful for a few minutes. For they have—this is what I mean by drones—a happy temperament, and as they are no good at all in any other direction, it is indeed time that they should be done to death by the workers of the hive if they do not exert themselves in the mere exercise of their temperament. And just as the drone of the hive lives immersed in the honey of his flowers and in the garnered stuff that the workers have brought home, so the drone man must continue to take active and continual pleasure in all the delightful things of this world. He must pounce on enjoyment with eager zeal, and glut himself on it

till he reels with the stupefaction of pleasure ; he must keep himself keen and alert for the smallest humorous or engrossing detail that is within his horizons : it is shameful if he does not go to bed every night tired with his own laughter and enjoyment. And woe to him if he invests his pleasures with the serious garb of duty ! The leader of the delectable life who says that he plays golf because he finds exercise so important for his health, or who sits out all afternoon to watch other people playing other games, and explains that his doctor (his doctor, forsooth !) tells him to have plenty of fresh air, or who drinks his delicious wine and says that it is good for his digestion, is a mere scampish hypocrite. He plays games because they are such fun ; he watches other people play because it amuses him ; he drinks wine because it tastes so nice.

And he must never falter on his primrose path ; the high gods have given him but one little talent, and all that is asked of him is that he should enjoy life enormously. He has got to do that, then. The soldier and sailor may not, perhaps, enjoy life, but they are useful in other ways. The drone is only useful in this one. He must never remit his efforts, and must never want to ; he must ' rush,' as the Old Humbug said, all the time, for if he ceases to rush he ceases to justify his existence at all. And—a heavenly destiny, one, too, beyond all desert of his—he does, if he is at all a conscientious drone, make other people a shade more cheerfully disposed than they would otherwise have been.

This breathless dissertation on drones requires at this point, as printers say, 'paragraphing.' In other words, I began to talk about one thing, and without pause talked about another. It was really the fault of the Old Humbug, who said that I wasted those days in which I didn't do something for somebody. I then justified my position on those days by pleading the desire to be a drone—a life which, as I have sketched it out, seems to me to be wholly admirable. I wish to Heaven I could be in the least like those adorable people. Misbegotten industry stands in my way, and a deep-rooted, but equally misbegotten, idea that if I am very industrious I shall one day write a good story. Also, I have not the drone temperament necessary for dronage. I am not, in fact, any longer defending myself, but extolling other people.

Loafers there are in plenty in this world, but personally I have no use for them. They lead the same external lives as the lover of life leads, but how different is the spirit that animates them! The loafer may have been side by side with the life-loving drone all day, at the same parties, at the same games, at the same music, but the one goes to all these things in order to get through the hours without boredom, while the other wishes the hours infinitely multiplied so that he might go to more. The one sucks enjoyment of but a stupefied sort from them; the other catches the iridescent balls and bubbles of joy that are cast like sea-spray over the tides of time, only to throw out double of what

he has received. He is like some joyful juggler : a stream of objects pours into the air from his flashing hands ; he catches them and hurls them into the air again, so that the eye cannot follow the procession of flying joys. And at the end, at the close of each day, he stands still for a moment, his hands full of them, his memory stored with them, eager for the next day.

How different is the loafer ! Have you ever seen the chameleon feed on flies ? It is just so that the loafer, who wants only to get through the hours, feeds on the simple, silly joys of life. In expression the chameleon is like a tired old gentleman with the face-ache, though the impression of face-ache is chiefly produced by cheeks swollen in other ways, for he rolls up his tongue in a ball in his mouth when he is going to feed. Then, with an expression of bored senility, he moves very cautiously to where a fly is sitting. When he is within range, he shoots out his tongue, and the fly sticks to the adhesive tip of it. There is a slight swallowing motion, and the chameleon again rolls about his greasy eye, looking for the next victim. The loafer, in a metaphysical sense, has got just such an adhesive tongue as the chameleon. He puts it out, and pleasures stick to it like postage stamps. Then he swallows them. Observe, too, when he has to make occupations for himself, how heavily and stupidly he passes the hours ! He will read the morning paper till midday, then totter out into his garden, sadly remove one weed from the path, and totter back to the house to throw it in the fire. Then

he will re-read a page of his paper, and write an unnecessary note with unnecessary care, probably wiping his pen afterwards. It will then be lunch-time. How different would the drone's morning have been! Even if he had been compelled to spend it on the platform of Clapham Junction, he would have constructed some 'dome in air' out of that depressing suburb. The flashing trains would have allured him (especially the boat-trains), and his mind would have gone long journeys to the sunny South. He would have built romance round the signals, and found a fairy-tale in the advertisements.

And what is the practical side of all this? for is it not temperament which makes the magic of these wonderful persons, and temperament is a thing which is supposed to be quite outside the power of its possessor to alter or amend?

Broadly speaking, I suppose that is true, and we who do not possess the magic would bungle terribly if we attempted to rival the flashing hands of the true conjurer. I do not suppose, at any rate, that it is worth while for the meditative recluse to spend his days and nights at festive gatherings, since he will never enjoy them himself, and, what is more important, he will, in his small way, eclipse the gaiety of those parties on which he sheds the gloom of his depressing countenance. Yet, since I believe with my whole heart that joy and simple pleasure, so long as they hurt nobody, are things wholly and entirely good, it behoves everyone to look sedulously in the garden of his mind to see whether he cannot

find there a few little seedlings of that species of temperament which I have tried to indicate. His garden may be the most strenuous and improving plot—a regular arboretum of high aspirations and earnest endeavours with the most beautiful gravel paths of cardinal virtues leading by the thickets and shrubberies of spiritual strivings, but, should he happen to find a few of these seedlings, and be able to raise them, they will not spoil the effect of the wholly admirable grove of moral purpose. To be quite candid, I think a little colour ' sets off,' as they say, the grandeur of high endeavour. It —well, it brightens it up.

NOVEMBER

'I,' remarked Helen, 'am the rose of Sharon, *and* the lily of the valley.'

She laid great stress on the 'and,' which gave a perfectly new significance to the verse.

'The French for lily of the valley is *muguet*,' said Legs, with an intolerably superior air.

'Oh, don't show off!' said she. 'The great thing in walking along a rail is to keep your balance.'

'Through the looking-glass,' said I. 'Upon which the White Knight fell head foremost into a hole——'

"'And kept on saying "Plenty of practice,"'" said Legs.

'It's easier if you wave your arms,' said she. 'Oh, there's a train coming. Where's the gum?'

Legs had the gum—a small penny bottle—and Helen hastily gummed a penny to the rail, and we all retired to the side of the line.

If you merely lay a penny on the rail, the chances are that the first wheel that goes over it causes it to jump, and it falls off, whereas, if you gum it——

There was a wild maniac shriek from the engine, suddenly dropping an octave as it passed us, and the huge train, towering high above us, thundered by with rattle of wheels and the throbbing oscilla-

tion of very high speed. A dozen bits of paper came trundling and dancing after it. The rear of the van telescoped itself into a tiny square, and the signal just above us, which had been down to let the train pass, shot up a warning, right-angled arm.

'Oh, well over sixty,' said Legs, with deep appreciation, 'and there's the penny sitting as tight as, as—I don't know. Lord, how hot!'

The penny had already been under half the wheels of four trains, and was so flattened that it was of knife-edge sharpness.

'If you stropped it a little, you could shave with it,' said Helen. 'What babies you are!'

Legs was already busy on the up-line, arranging two pins crossways on the gummed rail, so that they should be flattened and welded together, making an entrancing object closely resembling a pair of scissors.

'The up-train will be through in five minutes,' he said. 'Chuck me the penny, Helen.'

I had another object of interest—namely, a threepenny piece with a hole in it. I had tied a long string to this, the far end of which I held in my hand. The reason for this was that the coin was beginning to crack, but it would stand a wheel or two more, though it was already bigger than a sixpence; after a wheel or two I could pull it away.

'Gum!' said I.

We moved to the far side of the up-line, and waited. Soon from the tunnel a hundred yards below came a wreath of smoke, and the black-fronted engine raced towards us. Everything went right on that divine afternoon, and after four wheels

had passed I jerked my threepenny piece away. The scissors were adorable also, and it would be scarcely necessary to strop the penny. Of course, we made a *cache* of these objects, burying them in a small tin box with the addition of a piece of paper recording our names, weights, and ages. Legs also wrote a short confession of how he murdered his two infant children, and hid the bodies in a bramble-bush ten paces from the *cache*. There was no such bramble-bush really, which would make it more puzzling to the inquiring mind. He represented himself as being perfectly impenitent, and ready to commit similar crimes should opportunity occur. He signed it, Benjamin Yates of 21A, Park Lane, W. Then we went home to tea.

Legs had been in for his Foreign Office examination, and had come down to spend the next two days with us, before we all moved up to town ; also, to our deep-felt and secret joy, he had shown no desire to visit the Ampses, or talk any more German with Charlotte. The process of disillusionment began, I think, on the evening in October when he was here last, and the Ampses dined with us ; for I saw him overhear Mrs. Amps ask Helen who ' was the heir to all our beautiful property.' At that moment I almost pitied Mrs. Amps. She had begun by making jam, but I felt that she had gone on to cook Charlotte's goose. Legs, anyhow, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and took a couple of seconds to recover himself. I am sure I don't wonder. You require to recuperate after that sort of remark. I felt that

I knew all about Mrs. Amps when she asked that simple question. I felt as if I had known her parents and grandparents, and could prophesy about her children and grandchildren; and Legs' eyes, which till that moment had been quite shut, began to open, just to blink.

Next day, however, he lunched with them. What happened I do not know, since he has not told me; but he was rather silent in the evening, ate little, but drank four glasses of port after dinner. I think the instinct of the drowning of care was there, and he was slightly cynical and Byronic afterwards. I love Legs.

I hasten to add, lest I may appear unfeeling, that Charlotte has for the last week or two been kind and encouraging to another young man, who is the heir to far more beautiful property. I saw him at the golf-links yesterday in a bunker. He was arranging her hands so as to grasp her niblick properly. They seemed to want a great deal of arranging. By-and-by they allowed my opponent and me to pass. Charlotte seemed not to recognize me, or else she was really so much employed in making her hat stay on that she did not see me. I mentioned, however, to Legs that I had seen her, but that she had not seen me. It seemed to interest him very little.

But this morning, as Legs and I played golf over the grey back of the huge down that rises from our happy valley, it seemed a sheer insanity that we should all go up to London the next day, so blithe was the air, so invigorating to the whole sense. The short, springy turf seemed to put its own vitality into one's feet; they were shot forward

automatically without conscious effort. And—ah, the rapture !—(it occurred more frequently to Legs than to me) of seeing a clean white ball scud for a hundred yards or so low over the ground, and then rise swallow-like against the ineffable blue ! Golfers, I am told, reck nothing of their surroundings, provided only they drive far, approach dead, and hole their puts ; and so I must conclude—indeed, I conclude it for other reasons—that I am no golfer. But I am an epicure in my surroundings when I go a-golfing, and though the grey dunes and sandy hollows of the seaside course are most to my mind, I place very near those perfect joys the hugeness of scale which you get only on the uplands. To-day no whiff of vapour flecked the whole field of the shining heavens, and the country, grey and green, with fire of autumn beech-wood here and there, stretched map-like round us. But to the west the view was even more stirring to that desire of the infinite which lies so close to the heart of man. There fold after fold of downs, the knitted muscles of the huge, kind earth lay in unending interlacement. And it was all empty. There were no trees, no lines of hedgerows to break the void, and lend a scale to the eye. From the immediate green foreground slope after slope melted into grey, and from grey to the blue of distance, which fused itself into the tender azure of the sky's horizon, so that the line between earth and air was indistinguishable. It was as empty as the desert, yet one knew that from every inch of it a thousand lives rejoiced in the sun of November. Yes, even the knowledge

that there would be but few more of such hours before winter hurled its armoury of squalls on to the earth added, perhaps, to their joy. None could have expected such a November as has been ours. We have snatched it from winter ; it is our possession.

Yet the colour of the grass, no less than the underlying keenness of the air, savour of the sunless months. It is scarcely green ; it has been bleached by the torrid months, and Nature is too wise to let it shine forth in a fresh coat of colour when so soon it will sleep, waiting for the spring. High up in the liquid blue, too, of the sky there is the sparkle of frost, for all the warm strength of the sunlight. It is not summer that floats above our heads, soon to descend earthwards, but the frost and cold. Yet they bless the Lord also.

But though I feel all this, feel it in every bone and fibre of my body, I know that I feel it more when I am doing something else—as, for instance, playing golf. I think it must be that one pleasure quickens others. The fact of attempting to keep one's eye on the ball as one hits it makes the whole of one's perceptions more alert. If I was taking a solitary walk here, with no occupation except that of walking, I know quite well that I should not be conscious of the same rapturous well-being as I am now, when the object of my walk is to hit a small piece of indiarubber for three or four miles, hitting it, too, as seldom as possible. So it is not the mere hitting it that gives rapture, else the rapture would be increased by the frequency of the operation.

Oh, I have been talking on the stroke! This will never do. But it was my own stroke, and Hampshire flew about in fids in consequence.

This was at the twelfth hole, and it made the match square. Legs, I need hardly remark, was playing a pitiful game for him. But on the moment —this is one of the inexplicable things about those foolish people who play games—my whole mood changed. I cared no more at all for the empty, glorious downs. I did not mind whether the grass was blue, or grey, or green, or magenta. I saw no more flaring beech-woods, no more mapped counties. There was one desire only in the entire contents of my soul, and that was to beat Legs. I did not feel as if I even wanted anything so much as that, and if Mephistopheles had appeared at that moment to bargain for my salvation as the price of my victory, I should have signed in my blood or any other blood that was handy. But Mephistopheles was probably otherwise engaged. At any rate, after being still all square at the seventeenth, I drove into a silly irrational bunker that ought never to have been there at the eighteenth. I took three to get out. But we had a heavenly morning. If only . . . well, well. And Legs told Helen that he only just won, because he was completely off his game! The tongue is an unruly member. Mine is. Had I won, I should have certainly told Helen that Legs played a magnificent game, and I had only just won. That sounds more generous than his remark, but if you think it over, you will see that it comes to exactly the same thing.

Yes ; it seems an insanity to leave the country just now, especially since there is no earthly reason for our doing so. Divine things, it is true, are going on in town, for our matchless Isolde is conducting symphony concerts, and a perfect constellation of evening stars are singing together at the opera ; but, after all, Legs and I play the ' Meistersinger ' overture arranged for four hands on the piano ; while, for the rich soup of Sloane Street mud and the vapour-ridden sky, we have here the turf of the downland and the ineffable blue. In fact, I am sorry to go, but should be rather disappointed if I was told that I was not going. Helen characterizes this state of mind as feeble, which it undoubtedly is, and says that she is perfectly willing either to go to-morrow or to stop on another week, if I will only make up my mind which I want to do. But there is the whole difficulty : I haven't the slightest idea which I want to do. You might as well say to a dog which is being called from opposite quarters by two beloved voices : ' Only make up your mind which of us you like best.' If it knew, the question would be solved.

Well, the question was solved by tossing up, and then, of course, doing the opposite to what we had decided the arbitrament of the coin should indicate. If it was heads, we were to stop in the country ; and since it was heads, that helped us to decide that we would go to town. That, too, may seem a feeble proceeding, but I do not think it really is. To do anything as irrational as tossing causes the mind to revolt from the absurdity of abiding by the result.

The consequence is that a weighty factor for doing what the coin did not indicate is supplied ; for you never toss unless you are quite unable to decide.

So for the last afternoon the garden claimed me, for not only is the garden the symbol and embodiment of the country, but to me it is a sort of diary almost, since the manual acts of planting and tending have got so interwoven with that which made one's mind busy while the hands were thus occupied that the sight of this plant or that, of a new trellis, or the stacked sticks of the summer's sweet-peas, are, when one looks at them as now, retrospectively, on the eve of departure, retranslated back, as are the records of a phonograph, into the memories that have been pricked and stamped into them. All I see—croquet-hoops, flower-beds—without ceasing to be themselves, have all become a secret cipher. By some mysterious alchemy, something of oneself has passed into them. Secret fibres of soul-stuff are woven into them. Through the touch of the hands that tended them, something from the being of that which directed those hands has entered into their life, so that next year, it may be, some regret belonging to an autumn day will flower in the daffodils of our planting. Hope, I am sure, will flower too ; and with how vivid a wave of memory do I know what silent resolve went into the cutting back of that Gloire de Dijon ! Thus, when in June its fragrance streams in the air, one must trust that some fragrance not its own, but of a fruit-bearing effort, will be spread about the garden.

There, for instance, are the croquet-hoops still

standing, though it must be a month since we had played. A few withered leaves of the plane have drifted against the wires, and the worms have been busy on the neglected lawn, that speaks only of November. But that corner hoop has a significance beyond paint and wire. It is the record of the telegram that came out to me one morning in late September which I showed Legs. After that we abandoned the game, and went to the house. It may have more for us yet, that corner hoop—more, I mean, than that memory of which I have spoken. Joy or sorrow may be so keen, so poignant on some day yet hid behind the veil of the future, when I shall be looking at it, that till the day of my death it will never again be seen by my mortal eye without rousing an immortal and imperishable memory. It is thus, in a manner antimaterialistic, so to speak, that men, material things, are woven into the psychical web of life, so that, almost before the eye has seen them, they have sent the message of their secret significance to the brain.

Everywhere, wherever I look, the tangle of these subtle threads is spread, even as on summer dawns the myriad spinning of gossamer makes network on the grass, so that each is crossed and intertwined with a woof of others. There is the bank where I lay all one hot July day doing nothing, thinking nothing, just lapped in the tide of living things. That has gone home. That bank and the hours I passed there are part of me now, even as I feel that I am part of it, and I have but to look at it now to bask again in the absorbing stupor of the midsummer.

There, in its blades of grass and shadowed turf, is written my doing for the day. The bank holds it in kind, safe keeping, so that, when God inquires of me what I have done with that day that He gave me, the bank will be able to answer for me. Nor does it tell my secret to the croquet-hoop that holds another, nor to the clematis that on that day was a heaven full of purple stars spread over the trellis. There was nothing in all the treasure of the summer so beautiful, so triumphant as that ; but what to me now is the memory of the clematis ? The memory of a friendship that is over. At least, I was looking at it when I know that somebody I had loved and trusted was neither trustworthy nor lovable. It was as if a friend had pushed back the carpet from the boards of the room where he and I had so often been merry and intimate together, and showed me, with a sort of secret hideous glee, that a sewer flowed beneath the floor. Poor clematis ! it is sick at heart. Its thin, bare stalk shivers mournfully as this golden afternoon begins to turn a little grey with the chill wind of evening.

Ah, if only he had said he was sorry ! If only he had said that he knew it was wrong, but that the flesh was weak ! If only he had even contemplated the step, which to some extent undoes the wrong that has been done, I do not think the clematis would have shed a single one of its purple stars. All of us, saints or sinners, do dreadful things, the memory of which is sufficient to make us long to sink into the earth for shame. But he only smiled behind his hand, and with whispered gusto told me

about it, licking the chops of memory. It is *that* which matters.

That corner of the garden had delayed me long, and it was already getting dark when I had gathered up and fingered the gossamer threads that lay so thickly down the border that led to the gate from which descend the steps of the rose-garden. There were so many messages there. The bare stalks of phloxes and campanulas, Oriental poppies and hollyhocks, Japanese anemone and iris—all had something to say. Some memories were a little vague, faint, and dim even as the odour of the phloxes ; some were tall and resplendent like the hollyhocks ; some were vivid as the poppies. And then I went through the gate of the rose-garden and stood there. There was nothing there but the rose-trees ; there was no one there but Helen.

So the tale of the garden was told, and by the time it was finished dusk had begun to deepen, and cheerful beckoning lights were gleaming from the house. It was time to go in to take up, and with what love and alacrity, the pleasant hour of the present again ; for it is not ever good to linger too long over memories, or for however short a time to indulge in regrets, unless those regrets are to be built into the fabric of the present, making it stronger and more courageous. All other regrets, all other regarding of the past, which says, ' It is past ; it is irretrievably done,' is enervating and poisonous, and but paralyzes our energies. Indeed, it is better not to be sorry at all for the unwise, unkind,

and mistaken things we have done if our sorrow tends to unfit us for doing better in the future.

But just as I crossed the lawn, going towards the house, another memory started up out of the dusk so clearly that I almost thought that again I heard my name called from the garden, and almost expected, when I got indoors, to hear again the sound of shuffling, unshod feet on the stairs. The memory of that mysterious midnight hour, though I have not spoken of it again, is seldom out of my thoughts. It does not sit, so to speak, in the front row, but in the dimness that lies at the back of one's mind, out of which come those vague vapours which are, if they have body enough, eventually condensed into thought, just as out of thought is coined speech and action. There in that dark kitchen of the mind I know that the thought of that night has ever been simmering on the fire. Something within me is not content with the fact that even at the moment that the voice cried from the garden, at the moment when Legs saw the white face smiling at him, that dear soul passed to the other side. There is more to come yet. Else—here is the vapour taking the shape of thought at last—else why did Legs, who scarcely knew her, receive that warning? No echo of any memory of that night, strangely also, has ever come back to him. He knows no more about it now than he did the next morning, when he asked me if I had been sitting up late talking.

I have told Helen all about it; I have told her, too—for there is nothing so wild and fantastical that I would not tell it her—that there is some

uneasy guest sitting at my hearth who stays in the shadow, so that I cannot see his face. And she answered with a serenity that was almost reassuring, saying that, if something more was coming, there was still, whatever it was, nothing to fear; if otherwise, the uneasy guest was moonshine of the imagination. That seems to cover the whole ground. But the fact is that I am afraid of my fear —a thing for which it is idle to try to find excuses.

We are leaving quite early to-morrow morning, so, when I entered the house that evening after the tour of the garden, I had definitely finished with the country for some weeks to come. So, too, had Helen and Legs, for tea had already gone into the drawing-room. And even as I locked the garden-door behind me, I heard a sudden gust of wind come and shake the panes, as if this calm, golden day had been sent just for us, and that the moment we had finished with it the winds, overdue, but kindly waiting for us, began to drive their cloud-flocks out of the south-west. Nor was the coming of the rain long delayed. Even while we sat at tea, a sheet of it was flung with a sudden wild tattoo against the panes, and there hissed on to the logs of the open hearth a few stray drops. Legs paused, with his mouth full of crumpet.

'It makes me feel twice as comfortable as I was before,' he said. 'It must be so beastly out of doors.'

Legs had just uttered this thoroughly Lucretian sentiment, when—

The door opened, and Mr. Holmes was announced

I have refrained from mentioning Mr. Holmes before because I expected he would come in about now, big with purpose. He is a kind little gentleman, about forty-five years old, who lives with his sister, and does not do anything whatever. He is generally known as the Bun-hander, because no tea-party has ever been known to take place for miles round at which Mr. Holmes was not handing refreshments to the ladies. That is his strength, his forte. His weakness is just as amiable—though, perhaps, hardly so useful—for his weakness is Rank.

He constantly comes to see Helen—about once a fortnight, that is to say (for in the autumn he is very busy going to tea-parties)—for the reason, so Legs and I believe, that she is the daughter of the younger son of a peer. Helen will have none of this, and maintains that he comes to see her for Herself. Personally, I can behave beautifully when Mr. Holmes finds Helen and me alone, but I am rather nervous if Legs happens to be in the room, for he is quite unable to take his eyes off Mr. Holmes, but stares at him in a sort of stupor of wonderment. Once (that is a year ago now) he left the room very suddenly. Choking and muffled sounds were heard from the hall and the stamping of feet. Helen and I talked very loud to overscore this, and I trust Mr. Holmes did not hear. But when Legs is there, I am afraid (it is a sort of nightmare) that I shall be overtaken, too, with helpless giggling. If I begin, Helen will go off, and I can imagine no way of satisfactorily terminating the interview. Because if once I began laughing at Mr. Holmes, I do not

see how I could ever stop. His appearance, his voice, his conversation, are all quite inimitable.

He is small and inclined to stoutness, and has a fierce little moustache, so much on end that it looks as if it had just seen a ghost. Not long ago he had no teeth to speak of; now they are as dazzling and as continuous, as Mr. Wordsworth said, as the stars that shine. He has rather thin brown hair, which I will swear used to be streaked with grey, but is so no longer, and he wears three rings with stones in them. One is an emerald, so magnificent that it is almost impossible to believe in it. He is dressed in the very height and zenith of provincial fashion, and would no more be seen in shabby clothes than he would be seen without stays. Yes ; I maintain it, and even Helen, who was a perfect St. Thomas about it for long, has admitted that occasional creaks proceed from Mr. Holmes's person for which it is difficult to offer any other explanation. It was a creak, in fact, more than usually loud that made Legs leave the room on the occasion I have referred to. Down his trousers he has the most beautiful creases, and all his clothes nearly fit perfectly. He wears brown boots with cloth tops, above which when he sits down you can see socks with clocks on them stranglingly suspended. In the winter he wears a hat with a furrow in it, and in the summer a panama. He wears a knitted tie (just now it is rather the fashion here for young men to have ties knitted for them by their friends), which Helen says is certainly machine-made, with a pin in it. His shirt always has some stripe or colour in it, and his links are

invariably the same colour as the stripe. To-day the links were turquoise and the stripe light blue. And from top to toe it is all a little wrong, though, since I do not know how clothes are made, I cannot tell you what is wrong. The effect, however, is that, though so carefully arrayed, Mr. Holmes looks like a rather elderly shop-assistant going out on Sunday afternoon.

Mr. Holmes goes out much oftener than that, for he may be seen in the window of the club every morning from about half-past eleven till one. I have often seen him sitting in the window there looking at illustrated papers, and smoking a cork-tipped cigarette, ladies' size. Then he goes home to lunch, and after lunch either drives with his sister in a hired fly, or else, if it is very fine, goes round the ladies' golf-links, which are a good deal shorter than the men's. He has tea at the club, and sits there till dinner. Then, after a blameless day, he goes home to dine and sleep. I suppose no one in the world has ever done less of any description.

I have alluded to his weakness—rank ; he has another, which is gossip. He knows who was dining at the Ampses last Wednesday, and who lunched with the Archdeacon on Sunday, and how the Bishop's wife is. It is he for whom also the fashionable intelligence is written in the daily papers, and, though he never goes there, he knows who is in town, and who lunched at Prince's last Sunday, or walked in the Park, and how the Marquis of God-knows-what is after his operation. (He always

refers to a Marquis *as* a Marquis, to an Earl *as* an Earl.) But, best of all, perhaps, he loves infinitesimal intrigue, especially if it concerns Rank.

And here my portentous secret must burst from me. For the fact is that for the last three days the town has been convulsed, and I have been holding it all back, assuming an unnatural calm, so that it might all come in a deluge. For three days ago a Duchess came here to open a window, or shut a door in the town-hall, which had been put up in memory of something, and was entertained to luncheon afterwards by the Corporation. And on this eye-opening occasion Helen was sent in before the wife of the younger son of a Baronet. And in consequence the wife of the younger son of the Baronet cut her afterwards, as with a knife ; yet knife was no word for it : the averted eye was more like a scimitar. Before the assembled company, when Helen went to shake hands with her after lunch, she cut her, and she turned from her, revolving on her own axis like the eternal stars. Upon which, very properly, after two days' heated discussion, and a great demand for Debrett, public opinion sided with the wife of the younger son of the Baronet, on the ground that Helen took her husband's rank, which in this case happened to be none at all. What made it worse was that the Duchess, who should have known better, being an old friend of Helen's, came to tea with her afterwards in a motor-car covered with coronets for all the world to see.

You may imagine that the fat was in the fire after

that. Helen had no idea why the wife of the Baronet's younger son had cut her, and perhaps might never have known had not Mr. Holmes dropped in only yesterday and told her, adding that he was sure he could clear it up. I was not at home when this interview took place, but when he entered the room this afternoon, after having called only yesterday, it was certain that he must have come on this subject. He had a book in his pocket, which made an unusual bulge.

Legs was steeped in wide-eyed contemplation as Mr. Holmes had his tea. From time to time I glanced at him, and saw that the corners of his mouth were faintly twitching. His eye travelled from Mr. Holmes's face to his jewelled hands; it lingered about his clothes, but came back, lover-like, to his face. In a few minutes we had learned about everybody—how the Lord-Lieutenant of the county had driven through in his motor—not the Daimler, but a new Panhard—yesterday afternoon, stopping only at the fishmonger's, and taking the London road afterwards; how there had been a party at the barracks last night, at which there was music, but not very good music, Mr. Holmes was afraid; how the Bishop had not influenza at all, but only a bad cold; how The Pines had been taken by the Hon. Alice Accrington, who had a cork foot—so sad. A rhinoceros had trodden on the original one.

I had ceased to be able to look at Legs, but here I heard him give a little whimper, as a dog does when it wants a door to be opened for it. Helen all the time had been of impeccable behaviour. She

had asked just the right questions, and appeared so genuinely interested that I felt I had never known before of what depth of hypocrisy she was capable. Then Mr. Holmes's wealth of information began to grow thin, even as the stars burn thin at daybreak, and I knew that he was going to dawn, and that the true reason for which he came was going to break forth. He put down his cup on the tea-table, took a cigarette, and suddenly creaked.

If you can imagine a sneeze, a cough, a spit, the strangled wheeze caused by a fish-bone in the throat, and the noise an empty siphon of soda-water makes when you press the handle, all combined, you will faintly grasp what Legs did. His effort to swallow the whole of this mixed convulsion was most praiseworthy, though I should think dangerous, and it came to my ears only as if someone had done it half a mile away. Mr. Holmes, I am sure, heard nothing this time, and Legs left the room with his handkerchief to his mouth in the manner of mourners in the second coach at a funeral. There was no sound outside, but soon after a muffled tread overhead, where is his bedroom. Then for a moment I caught Helen's eye. She looked so inexpressibly grave that I nearly asked her who was dead. Then dawn came. Mr. Holmes has a high cackling voice, and the bulgy volume in his pocket was 'Whitaker's Almanack.'

'I should have come before,' he said, 'but I wanted to come to you last, and really the afternoon has flown. About Tuesday now. Dear lady, you only took your right place. There is no ques-

tion about it. I have been to the Mayor, I have been to the Archdeacon. Look.'

He found a page in Whitaker, and gave Helen the volume. It was a table of precedence. I saw 'Eldest sons of younger sons of peers' underlined.

'Look at the next column,' he said. 'The sister takes the rank of her husband *or* her elder brother. Now see where younger sons of Baronets and their wives come!'

Far away below eldest sons of younger sons of peers, in an outer darkness below even members of the fifth class of the Victorian Order, I saw that obscure relationship. My emotions of various kinds almost suffocated me. Helen was justified before all the world. It was *her* turn to cut the wife of the younger son of the Baronet if she chose.

So we talked very pleasantly for a quarter of an hour about the movements of the aristocracy, and then Mr. Holmes 'rose to go.' His cab was waiting, and I helped him on with a very magnificent fur coat in the hall, which in the somewhat indistinct light seemed to be made of the purest rabbit skin. In the dimness of the landing above I thought I could see an obscure shadow leaning over the bannisters which resembled Legs.

'I hope, after this, your wife will take her proper place,' said Mr. Holmes. 'Of course, everyone knows the Duchess came here to tea.'

He lit a cigarette, and I heard the bannister tremble slightly, as if from an infinitesimal earthquake.

'It is so kind of you to have taken so much trouble,' said I firmly.

'It was nothing. I am sure you need have no further anxiety.'

I went back to the drawing-room. Helen's face was buried in a sofa-cushion, and Legs came downstairs in three jumps.

So we laughed till it was time to dress for dinner. Occasionally we seemed to be recovering, but then somebody said 'Creak,' or 'Baronet,' and a fresh relapse took place.

I pity all poor souls who do not know Mr. Holmes. It is so sad for them—sadder than the lady with the cork foot. Oh, think of it! This triumphant vindication of Helen (which is all wrong, by the way) will last him a long, long time. It has been a campaign, triumphantly concluded, and I should not in the least wonder if he has half a bottle of champagne to-night. And after a time the excitement will die away, fading like a golden sunset, and he will settle down to his ordinary life again, and read the paper in the morning, and go for a little drive in the afternoon, and have tea and toast at the club afterwards. And in the spring the Panama hat will come out, and the rich fur coat be put away, and he will hand strawberries instead of buns, and iced coffee instead of tea, and perhaps play a little croquet. But this week has been a great week for him—it really has. If you want to understand the gloriousness of Mr. Holmes, you must take my word for it that nothing so engrossing has happened to him for months.

DECEMBER

DECEMBER

This once-happy family has suddenly returned to the pit whence it was digged, and it is impossible to imagine any more depressing spectacle than we present. Dawn in faint flickers is beginning to shine on the wreck, and occasionally for a moment or two, though we may be over-sanguine, Helen and I can dimly imagine being happy again. Legs cannot do that yet; it is still midnight gloom with him.

The intelligent reader will scarcely need to be told that it is the influenza that has blackened the world like this. Helen began, and Legs and I followed within twenty-four hours. That, somehow, is a relief to her, since she feels she did not give it us. As if it mattered where it came from! Besides, personally I would rather catch it from her than anyone else. Legs has had the worst visitation, because, after it was quite certain he had got it, he persisted in attending the last night of the autumn opera season, did not enjoy it at all, of course, by reason of a splitting headache, and was really ill for a day or two. I was infinitely wiser. As soon as the nymph touched me with her fairy hand I went firmly to bed, turned my face to the wall like

Hezekiah, and stopped there till the fever was over. After five days I tottered downstairs to find an old, old woman sitting by the fire. It was Helen.

I think that was the most dreadful day I ever remember. She told me again and again how ill I looked until I was goaded into a sort of depressed frenzy, and said I couldn't possibly look as ill as she. We both had beef-tea in the middle of the morning, and to my horror, when it was brought, it was brought not by Raikes, my man who is as indispensable to this house as is the carburetter to a motor-car (for it won't run without), but by an Awful Thing that I never saw before. In answer to an inquiry, I was told that Raikes felt very ill, and had asked the Awful Thing to bring us our beef-tea instead of him. So I sent her back to Raikes with a thermometer that he was to be so good as to put under his tongue for one minute, and then return. It came back recording 102 degrees. I gave the Awful Thing the thermometer to wash, and she instantly dropped it on the floor. It was, of course, broken into twenty million fragments, but I remembered that, though I was a worm, I was a Christian worm, and said: 'Never mind. Please tell Raikes that he is to go to bed instantly.' I then picked up the twenty million fragments, and cut myself severely. I said 'Damn!' quite softly.

Helen winced, which was merely intended to annoy me, and it succeeded admirably.

So there we sat exactly like that awful picture called 'Les Frileux,' in which an old man and an old woman sit apart under a leafless tree. The

ground is covered with the dead leaves. Soon they will die, too.

It is impossible to depict the dreariness of that morning. Outside a sort of jaundiced day showed the soupy mud that flooded Sloane Street, through which motor-buses, which once I thought so fine, splashed their way. A few sordid people under umbrellas bobbed by the windows, and as the darkness increased a man with a long stick began to turn up the lamps. Then it instantly got rather lighter, and another man (not the same one) with another long stick came and turned them down again. Upon which Egyptian darkness settled down over the town, and I must suppose that the first man had caught the influenza, for he never turned them up any more.

Helen was not reading; she was sitting by the fire looking mournfully at the coals. This would not do at all, and in the intervals of a paroxysm of coughing I asked:

'How is Legs this morning?'

'Worse,' said Helen.

I took up the *Daily Telegraph*, and read the list of the people who were dead. I knew one of them slightly. Then my cut finger began to bleed again, which reminded me of the Awful Thing.

'Servants are so ridiculous and tiresome,' I said. 'I should think your maid might have found time to bring up our beef-tea, instead of that dreadful girl. I don't know where you get your servants from.'

'Barton went to bed yesterday with influenza,'

said Helen wheezily. 'She is very feverish—worse than Legs.'

I can't say why, but this news made me feel rather better, so I lit a cigarette. It tasted exactly as if it had been made of the green weed which grows on stagnant horse-ponds. I felt much worse again at once, and was quite sure my temperature was going up. But I could not have the mournful satisfaction of knowing that this was true, because the thermometer was broken. And my finger continued to bleed. The blood was very bright red—probably arterial. Yet, whatever was happening, it seemed impossible that things were as desperate as I thought them, and I made the excellent determination to do something.

'Will it disturb you if I play the piano?' I asked Helen.

'Not the least.'

I attempted to play the 'Études Symphoniques,' beginning with the last variation, by reason of the sky-scraping spirits of it. I don't think I played any correct notes at all, and Helen (again to annoy me) made the noise which tiresome people make to show that a wrong note gets on their highly sensitive nerves. It consists of a whistling intake of the breath. Though I had only played a dozen bars, the white notes in the treble were spotted with blood, as if I was a Jew and the piano was the lintel of the door on Passover night. It was absurd to go on playing on a blood-boltered piano, even if I could play the right notes, which I could not. So again, with the laudable idea of doing something, I

staggered upstairs, brought down a moistened towel, and proceeded to clean the keys. I struck notes from time to time, and Helen kept on wincing.

'Is that necessary?' she asked at length.

'Yes, because I have bled over the piano. Besides, I'm cleaning it with the soft pedal down.'

The door was flung open, and the Awful Thing appeared.

'Dinner,' she said, and left the door open.

We went downstairs. 'Dinner' in Raikes' indisposition was huddled on to the table. There were pieces of moist fish under one cover. There was a ginger pudding under another. There were large potatoes under a third; and under the fourth a rich and red beef-steak. Then despair descended on me.

'Is the cook ill, too?' I asked of the Awful Thing.

'Yes, sir.'

'Who cooked this? Or, rather, didn't?'

'Please, sir, I did.'

Then quite suddenly, both for Helen and me, dawn began to break for a little. Here was three-quarters of the establishment incapacitated, and the Awful Thing was calmly doing everybody's work as well as her own, which was that of a housemaid. Helen cheered up at once.

'Please give me some fish,' she said to me. 'It looks quite excellent.'

I helped her largely and sumptuously. We both understood each other at this moment, and I put a thumping helping on to my own plate.

Helen, greatly daring, took a greedy mouthful, and spoke to the Awful Thing, who was beginning to beam largely on us.

'Delicious,' she said to her. 'I had no idea you could cook so beautifully. You needn't wait: we will ring. And you must have help in at once. Will you telephone to Mrs. Watkins' agency, asking for a—(she paused, and I know she was going to say 'cook')—a housemaid?'

The Awful Thing smiled from ear to ear, and a moment afterwards we heard the insane ringing of the telephone.

'Oh, I *couldn't* send for a cook just this moment,' said Helen, when the girl had left the room. 'She was bursting with pride at having cooked this. But if I eat it I shall be sick. What are we to do?'

The girl in her enthusiasm had built the fire three-quarters of the way up the chimney, though the day was muggy and warm beyond all telling. Into the heart of the blaze we stuffed large pieces of fish, which burned with a blue and oily flame.

'Now ring,' said Helen.

The girl returned after a long pause.

'Please 'm, Mrs. Watkins hasn't a housemaid to send, by reason of so much illness. But she can send a cook,' she said, and her face fell.

'It's such a pity, when you can cook so well,' said Helen; 'but we must have somebody. You can't do all the work.'

'A char and I could manage, 'm,' she said, changing the plates with an awful clatter.

'Oh, not with Mr. Legs ill,' said Helen. 'We

shall have you knocked up next, and where should we be then ?'

The radiant smile returned to the girl's face.

' Give me some steak, Jack,' said Helen, ' and a potato. How delicious it smells !'

The Awful Thing again left the room, leaving, as it were, the fragrance of her smile behind her.

We made no attempt to eat any of the second course, but put two large slices of steak, two potatoes, and a big spoonful of perspiring cauliflower into the fire. Pieces of ginger-pudding followed it to the burning ghaut, and soon the door again opened, and coffee was brought in. This was an after-thought, I fancy, though ill-inspired and gritty. But there was a coal-scuttle.

I am afraid we both relapsed again after lunch, though for a time the shining example of the housemaid who had done the work of everybody else inspired us to attempt to play picquet, bezique, and the piano. But these were all hopeless : it did not seem worth while dealing, and, in point of fact, the attempt at a duet came to a conclusion at the end of the first page, for Helen only groaned and said :

' I can't turn over.'

But that, I am thankful to say, was our low-water mark.

Sunshine began to shine more strongly on the wreck when Legs, two days afterwards, came downstairs, with the cheering remark that he felt so ill that he was sure he couldn't be as ill as he felt. Soon after he burst into hoarse laughter.

'I shall cheer up when I have counted ten,' he remarked.

Well, on the whole, when it was put simply and firmly like that, it seemed the best thing to do. Legs took charge of the cheering process, and ordered a basin, soap, and three churchwarden pipes, and we blew soap-bubbles, which, though it may not be in itself a work of high endeavour, had at least the result of making us do something, which is always a good thing. So, when that was over, in order to contribute to the wholesome atmosphere of employment, I brought in and read to him and Helen what I had written that morning, and had designed to appear in the book you are now reading. It was—I will not deceive you—a string (a long one) of cheap and gloomy reflections on the mutability of life, the reality of suffering, and the certainty of death. I had taken some trouble with it, but the most poignant and searing sentences made Legs simply roll in his chair with laughter that was noiseless merely because his throat was in such a state of relaxation that it could not make sounds. But with eyes streaming and in a strangled whisper he said :

'Oh, do stop a moment till I don't hurt so much with laughing, and then read it again.'

I looked at Helen. She had a handkerchief to her face, and her shoulders shook with incontrollable laughter.

'It's much the funniest thing you ever wrote,' she said. 'Isn't it, now? Begin again at "All the pain and sorrow with which we are surrounded"

—oh no, before that—something about "It is when we are racked with suffering ourselves." Oh, Legs, isn't it heavenly ?'

Legs had recovered himself a little, but still drummed with his feet on the carpet.

'I never knew I could feel so much better so quickly,' he said. 'I felt a mere worm when I proposed soap-bubbles. I want it all again from the beginning, where what you thought was sunlight was barred with strange shadows. O Lor ! '

So I gave them this intellectual—or should I say spiritual ?—treat once more, and then threw the manuscript into the fire, amid the shrill expostulations of the others. Legs made heroic attempts to save it, but fruitlessly, or, indeed, I would print it here, as a warning to those who do not feel very well to postpone their meditations upon life and death until they feel a little better. Also, I do not think that one's reflections on any subject are likely to be of much value unless they are founded on some sort of experience, and, to be quite honest, I had founded my views that morning on the mutability of life and the anguish of the world on the depression which was the result of a feverish cold. They were depressing enough, but I do not think that they were of sufficiently solid foundations. They proved, it is true, extraordinarily cheering to Helen and Legs, but one cannot be certain that the rest of the world would be equally exhilarated. They might be taken seriously, though Helen says I need not have been afraid of that.

A REAPING

Every man, even a pessimist, is supposed to have a perfect right to form his own opinions, but if I had my way (there is not the least likelihood of it) I should establish a censorship of the press, which should be in the hands of six young and cheerful optimists, who should decide whether such opinions were fit for publication. Quite rightly literature of an indecent nature, and work which may be supposed to have a tendency encouraging to criminals, is not allowed to be disseminated. I should put a similar prohibition on the dissemination of discouraging books, books which might be expected to suggest or foster the opinion that the world is a poor sort of place, and that God isn't in His heaven at all. Even if this was proved to be true, I would count it criminal to attempt to convince anybody of it; it would be a murderous assault on the happiness of private individuals. The law does not allow one to poison a man's bread with impunity, so how much more stringently should it forbid the poisoning of the inward health of his soul! Nothing but harm ever came from the dissemination of depressing truths, nothing but good from the dissemination of innocent and joyful beliefs, even should it be proved that they had no foundation whatever. For if the world is a dreary and painful place, so much more need is there of courage and a high heart to render it the least tolerable, and if we are to be snuffed out like candles when we come to the end of our few and evil years, how much more is it the part of wisdom to snatch a little happiness out of the circumambient annihilation!

And to think that only this morning I had actually tried to commit this crime, and was only saved from it by Legs' unutterable laughter. To be truthful, I felt a little offended when he first began to laugh, and inwardly hoped that he would soon grow depressed and thoughtful as I continued to tell my rosary of discouraging things. But I need not have indulged that hope ; it was forlorn from the beginning.

Instead, it made both him and Helen feel much better. I am so content to leave it at that. I had hoped—I had, indeed—when I wrote those depressing pages (which I wish to Heaven I had not burned) that possible readers might see part of the serious side of things under the discouragement of my winged words. But now—two days later—I am far more content that those two darlings should have laughed at what was written with such seriousness, than that all those into whose hands the printed record of that manuscript might have fallen should have sighed once over my jaundiced views about life and death, and sickness and mutability.

Of course, death is an extremely solemn affair, but it seems to me now—we are all recovering fast, and are drinking hypophosphates, and beginning to be greedy again—that the solemnity of it ought to have been discounted long ago, if it is going to be solemn at all. Everyone, of course, is at liberty to take life solemnly from the time he begins to think at all. But whatever our attitude towards life is, the same ought to be our attitude towards death, whether we believe that there is a continuance of life afterwards, or whether we are so unfortunate

as to believe that there is the quenched candle. For in the one case death is but the opening of a door into a fuller light, a thing, it is true, that may affect one for the moment, since from the weakness of the flesh we cling to what we know, while in the other death is just extinction, a consummation which no pessimist should fear, since while he lived he had held so poor an opinion of life. So whether we regard life as a pleasant interlude in something else, or whether we regard death—a thing unthinkable to me—as the extinction of consciousness, I cannot believe that he is not a guest who is welcome when he comes. Personally I do not want him to come for a long time, since I am delighted with the world, and it would be most annoying to die now when one is just recovering from influenza, and hopes to go to the Richter concert to-morrow. But whatever one's belief about the future is, I cannot see that there is an essential horror about death. I can conjure up horror of some kind about going to the dentist, about looking up trains in a Bradshaw, since the print is so execrable, and the connections so unruly, but I go my journey, or I go to the dentist, and get to my destination, or am relieved of a troublesome tooth. Life does not seem to me the least troublesome, it is true, but let us take it that by death I get to my destination, or in any case get nearer it.

Besides, how frightfully interesting!

I did not die, but went to the Richter concert instead. Legs wished to go, too, but that was

clearly idiotic, and so Helen and I tossed up as to which of us should go, and which remain at home. I won, and went.

There was Isolde in his high chair. (Probably an intelligent critic will say that Isolde was a woman, and I mean Tristan. But I don't.) He waved a little wand, and the spirit of the Meistersingers filled the hall. It was not, so it struck me, a remembrance only of their harmonious joviality, a mere picture of them ; it was they who rollicked and made processions in the great thumping triads of their march. There they sat, each with his business, town clerk, and vintner burgomaster, and lawyer, and, best of all, the old tender-hearted shoemaker, on whose kindly face upturned to the sky one feather of the bird of love had fallen, though it had never come and nestled in his bosom. But it was not with bitterness that so great a loss had filled him ; it had but refined him to a mellow kindliness that made all young things love him. There they all sat, so the band told me, over their songs and their sober carousing, till the others went home, and Sachs was left alone with music yet unsung echoing in his kind old head, and throbbing in his youthful heart. But he knew that such Divine melody was not to be realized by him ; some master of music had yet to come and put into notes and audible harmony that which existed but in the temple of his dreams, in the garden of things a man may conceive, but may not realize. Then came there the gracious young knight, and Sachs heard that of which he had dreamed, the song taught by

the birds and the choirs of Nature to the ardent heart of youth.

The triumph took wings and soared, lifting Sachs with it, him and his yearnings, and that fine old music, too, which was his. Inextricably mingled, they were knit one into each other, soaring into the sunrise.

Thereafter we were taken to the bleak mountain, where should gather the maidens of storm, who did the will of Wotan. It was high and exposed above the region of trees, and shrill blew the winds over it, and the heavens streamed above it. Fast and thick rode the army of menacing clouds, for the tempest in which the Valkyries rejoice, riding their untamed steeds down the swift roadway of the winds, was broken out in mad fury. Yelling and screaming, it drove in mad circles of wrath round the place where the nine maidens should foregather that evening, each with the fruit of her day's quest slung across her saddle, each with a hero who should drink that night of the wine of the gods, which should pour into his veins the fire of eternal life in place of the faint mortal blood that had beaten there before. Yet it was not love the maidens sought. It was danger and death and heroic enterprise that bore them so swiftly on their errands, and lit in them a fire brighter than love has ever kindled. Their wine was the buffet of the tempest, their meat the strong winds of God.

Then there was heard, faint at first, the beating of the immortal hoofs in the rush of flying steeds; from

east and west there shone out remote fires in the bedlam of the clouds, increasing, getting nearer and more blinding, till through the darkness of the tempest could be seen the figures of the maidens gathering to their trysting-place, some at the gallop, some flying, and all drunk with adventure and swift deeds. Each that day had prospered, each had a hero at her saddle, swooning now in death, but soon to be restored to the fuller life.

So gathered they, but as yet one was still missing —Brünnhilde, the swiftest and best of them all, the dearest to the heart of Wotan, for, indeed, she was none other than his heart and his inviolable will. And while yet the others wondered at her tarrying, she came. But no hero had she. She but led a woman into the midst of her sisters, for pity had touched her fierce heart with so keen and intimate a pang that she had disobeyed the behest of Wotan, and saved her of the race which he had doomed to destruction. . . . The sorrow and the pain of the world had entered into her. Henceforth no more there would be for her the starry splendour of Valhalla, throned on the thunder and rosy with the light of eternal dawn. Soon for this her deed should another light shine on tower and palace wall —the light of the flames that consumed it.

Tempest, and love, and sorrow, and the doom of the immortal gods all made audible in the eternal kingdom of the air ! How is it that, when once one has heard a miracle like this, one can ever so far forget it as to go back to the meanness of little miry

ways ? There are so many big things in the world, and though one knows that, and has, according to one's scale, seen and understood their size, yet we can still be so gross of perception that one can sit down, blear-eyed of vision, to write twopenny-halfpenny reflections about sorrow and mutability ! (And be rather pleased with them, too, until Legs and Helen laughed themselves all out of shape.)

How large a place, too, in that which makes for size and the breeziness of living, does Art in some form or other occupy for most of us ! Music and painting, literature and drama, are great doors flung wide to admit one to the sunshine of God. Often, even to the spiritually-minded, the avenues of prayer and directer communion seem somehow blocked ; to others, the majority, they are never wholly open. But to any who have an appreciation at all of what is beautiful, it must be a dark hour indeed when that approach is altogether shrouded and black, when neither Angelo, nor Velasquez, nor Shelley, nor Wagner, has a candle to give one to light the way. Millions of beautiful minds have their approach here. To millions all idea of a personal God, to be approached directly, seems inconceivable, but it seems to me to be one of the perfectly certain things in this very uncertain world that the passionate worship of beauty, in whatever sort manifested, is no less a direct invocation than prayer and the bent knee. The study and the love for ' whatsoever things are lovely ' is as royal a road, perhaps, as the other, for the passion for what is beautiful is no less than the passion for the only

Beautiful, and by such as feel that, all that is filthy is as unerringly condemned as it is by those who call 'filthy' by another name—'sinful.' For the perception of anything beautiful has to the perceiver a force of purging, while to the gross sense it is a sealed thing.

> 'O world as God has made it, all is beauty;
> And knowing this is love, and love is duty,
> What further can be sought for or declared?'

And to that I say 'Amen.'

The 'kennel,' as that same magician of words said, is 'a-yelp' at this. Artists, of whatever sort, are supposed to be loose of life. Where that extraordinary delusion arose I have no idea, unless it had its origin in some superficial observer of the manners and ways in the Latin quarter of Paris. That things not technically parochial may have occurred there, who would deny? But for my part I think it just as un-Christian to nag, and to vex, and to be unkind as to be anything else under the sun. In fact, to put it broadly, I would as soon be a drunken and kind man as be a sour and total abstainer. Sour and total abstainers will turn on me their eyes of smiling pity and horror, but perhaps it is only a matter of taste.

But to be 'nice' to people seems so immensely important. You may lecture on the Lamentations of Jeremiah for hours together, with a battery of historical facts to help you, and yet do no particular good; but if you help a lame dog, canine or human,

over a stile, you have been a far better Christian. I dare say that word offends some people, so I will cancel it, and say that you have been of far greater service in a world that has fortuitously come into being, and will as fortuitously go out of being. Whatever may be the truth about things seen and unseen, happiness is quite certainly better than misery, and laughter is better than the most edifying tears.

The finger of the gloomy moralist is pointed at me. I knew it was going to be pointed—and in a sepulchral voice he says: 'What about death?'

The fact is that I don't know (nor does he), and it is not my affair. While I am alive I prefer to drink deep of the joy of life than to speculate about what may come next. I can conjure up my death-bed as often as I choose, and make it a scene of moving pathos and dim vexed doubts. There is nothing so easy. I can without the slightest effort advance really profound problems as to 'what it all means,' since there is nothing so easy as asking unanswerable questions. What of the death of the wasp which I killed gleefully last August with a tennis-racquet? I haven't the slightest idea. All I know is that if next August another ventures to buzz round my head when I am having tea on the lawn after a perspiring set, I shall, if possible, kill it again.

If only the gloomy moralist could give me a reasonable theory to show why I could not exterminate wasps, I would accept it. But he can't.

He only says it puzzles him. It puzzles me, too, but in the interval I kill the wasp.

The fact is (degrading though it may sound) that I do not really believe that we are any of us capable of understanding the mind of the Infinite God. Philosophers try to explain little bits of it, and in their explanation of the little bit of it bang their heads together like children playing hide-and-seek in the dark. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.* The poor children have terrible headaches. I am extremely sorry, but it is, after all, their fault. Instead of playing hide-and-seek in the dark, they should go out and play in the light ; then no heads would be hit together.

It is quite maddening to think of the energy expended over this hide-and-seek, when all the time the garden of the world's beauty is ready waiting outside the door. If you have the instincts of a beast, perhaps it is better to grope in the dark ; but if you have the rudiments of any other condition, go and play. All the beauty that the world holds is at your command. All that really matters in this world is to be enjoyed very cheaply. Most things worth reading can be bought for a shilling or two, and if that is not 'handy,' look at a tree instead, and absorb the life that shines in each growing twig of it. Or if you are musically minded, hear, as I have just heard, the glories of the maidens of the storm.

Of course, no one thing is the least more wonderful than any other. All that happens, if we look at it at all closely, is a marvellous conjuring-trick. Why don't ducks come out of hen's eggs ? Is it not

marvellous that chickens invariably issue? If you go a step farther back, and learn something about the continuance of type, it becomes even more wonderful. 'How' can be told us, but never 'why.' And so I am confident in the unanswerableness of my riddle. Why do sounds like those of the violin and the brass in the 'Ride of the Valkyries' convey the essence of storm and tempest?

Another conjuring-trick of the most delightful kind occurred next morning. At twelve o'clock last night the streets of London had, without asking (thereby reversing the sad tale of Oliver Twist), been given a second helping of brown porridge. It was ankle-deep on the roadway of Sloane Street, thick brown porridge of mud; then during the night the temperature went down, and it froze. The result is that for the copious soup we are given a clear, dry roadway. There is no mud of any kind, not even frozen mud. The street is clean and dry, as if Oliver Twist had licked it. But where has gone that two inches of obfusc lather? Has the wood-pavement drunk it in? Has it gone into the air? Has some celestial housemaid, like the Awful Thing, been set to sweep the streets, even as she has swept the sky, and given us the invigoration of frost in exchange for the wet blanket of chilly cloud? Coming back from Richter last night, the streets were swimming; eight hours later (or it may be nine) one might walk barefoot across the road, or spread one's dinner there, and get no taint. How

it will be sparkling on the grasses and brave evergreens at home, turned to diamond spray by the red sun of frosty mornings !

'O world as God has made it !' . . . How often involuntarily, as if coming from without, that line rings in my head ! And how very little we, with all our jealousies, and depressions, and bickerings, and follies, are able to spoil or dim the beauty that is cast so broadly there. Puny as are our efforts for good, it really seems to me that our attempts at being evil are even more impotent and microscopic. We are often as tiresome and unpleasant as we know how to be, yet all the time we are swimming against that huge quiet tide of the beauty of the world as God made it, the knowledge of which is love, and beyond which there is no further declaration possible. Sometimes, if we are very active indeed, and exert ourselves very much, we can stand still or even move a little way in opposition to the great tide, but soon our efforts must relax, and we are swept down again with the current that eternally flows from the heart of the Infinite, and returns there again in those pulsations that are the life and the light of the world.

It is impossible, indeed, unless we say that evil is the vital principle of the world, to think otherwise. War there is between the two huge forces, but it is just Satanism, and nothing else whatever, that makes people say that the world is going from bad to worse. If you are so unfortunate as to be a Satanist, there is nothing more to be said, and I

hope the devil will give you your due ; but if otherwise, there can be no other conclusion than that good, all that is lovely and fine, is steadily gaining ground. For it does not seem reasonable to suppose that God contemplates some swift heady manœuvre which shall suddenly take evil in the rear, and in a moment rout the antagonism. At any rate, as far as we can possibly judge, it is by quiet processes that He deals with the sum of the world, even as He deals with the units that make it. For just as nobody has any right to expect that the evil in his nature will be suddenly expunged, even though the moment should be one of blinding revelation, so we should acquiesce in the slow progress of the sum-total. For there are only three possible alternatives—the first (namely, that the progress is from bad to worse), which is Satanism ; the second, that there is now in the world (and will be) exactly the same amount of evil and good as there has always been, in which case you are confronted with the absurd proposition of two absolutely equal forces having made this scheme of things, which will war to all eternity ; and the third, that good is stronger than evil, and is quietly gaining ground.

The objection to the first alternative is that it is Satanism—a very fatal objection. The objection to the second is that it is so stupendously dull. There cannot possibly be any point in anything if the two forces are equal. There can be no struggle in the mind as to whether one ought or ought not to do certain things, if whatever you do or don't

does not make any difference. There remains the third alternative. The objection to that is . . . well, I can't see there is any.

Hours ago this house has been asleep, the house in which I write on this early morning of the New Year, the house which is home to me, even as my own is ; for it is the house—you will have guessed—where lives she who is neither dearer nor less dear than Helen, and where we always spend the week and a little more that begins before Christmas and finishes a little after the New Year has been swung from the voices of mellow bells. Before midnight we sat in the oak-panelled room and played the most heavenly games, charades, and insane gymnastic exercises, and table-turning, with terror when the dreadful table turned in a really unaccountable manner, all consecrated by love and laughter ; and then, when the Old Year was to be numbered by minutes that the fingers could reckon, we drew nearer to the log fire and wished each other that which we all wanted for each. Legs' triumphant entry into the Foreign Office was no longer capable of a wish, since it was already accomplished, so he was wished a wife ; and—you will understand that we were all very intimate—my mother was wished freedom from all anxiety of whatever kind ; and the old nurse of ninety years who had acted charades with us with astonishing power was wished her century ; and I was wished the holding of the frost, so that I might skate—they were flippant again—and two cousins were respectively wished a miscroscope—one

is of tender years—and a motor-car; and then, just as the clock jarred, telling us there was but a minute more to the New Year, it was Helen's turn to be wished, and somebody said, 'Your heart's desire'; and she understood.

Immediately afterwards the clock struck, and everybody kissed everybody else, and said 'Happy New Year,' and no more. For you *must not* say anything more than that: you must not even say 'Good-night,' else the charm is broken. So in dead silence we lighted bedroom candles, for the ritual was well known, and separated. And who knows but that all about the house, as in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' the dances of the fairies circled up and down by the light of drowsy fires?

JANUARY

JANUARY

A HUNDRED pounds have suddenly and unexpectedly appeared on the horizon. People who are very rich have not the slightest idea what that means to us. People who are very poor have not the slightest idea either, because they would probably buy a public-house, or good-will, or something of that nature, and never have any fun out of it at all. But to people who 'jog along' a hundred pounds is a treat which neither rich people nor poor can form any conception of. To those who just pay their way, as we do, it means several weeks somewhere. The only question is 'Where?' At this point in our argument it was impossible to proceed. Helen and I were both being so unselfish that we couldn't go on. She said she longed to have two or three weeks in Switzerland; I said that what I really wanted was to go to the Riviera for a fortnight. Then, as always happens, these subterfuges broke down, and we both confessed that we neither of us really wanted to go to where we said we did. She wanted to go to Nice; I wanted to go to the high altitudes. So, with the understanding that we were to go where the coin said we should, and not otherwise, we tossed up. It was high altitudes.

His country put in a claim for Legs at the Foreign Office, unfortunately, and he could not come with us; but we felt, when we observed the urbanity of the French customs-house officials, who obligingly shut their eyes to the presence of large quantities of tobacco, and the politeness of the railway officials, that Legs had probably made himself felt in our foreign relations already, and that he was responsible for all this very civil behaviour. At Bâle, however, where we had to change at the awful hour in the morning which is neither night nor day, we found that Legs' diplomacy had not yet had time to make itself felt, for we were subjected to a searching scrutiny. Luckily, I had had experience of the manners and customs-house officials of Bâle before, and had transferred my tobacco into my coat pockets, thus frustrating the baffled Teuton. But I am afraid it gave me certain secret glee to observe that my travelling companion of the night before—a stout white man, with a name on his labels so long that I could not read it, who had snored all the time—was caught, and his rich stores of cigarettes taken from him, to be sent, I suppose, to Berne, for the delectation of the President of the Republic.

Switzerland is a land that always arouses curiosity as to how it came about that a country in which the people are so small, so 'toy,' should in itself be on so gigantic and marvellous a scale. Is it that the living among these stupendous surroundings has somehow dwarfed the people, or has Nature, by one of her inimitable contrasts, made the human part of Switzerland so insignificant in order to set off the

vastness of peak and snowfield? Certainly the glib commonplace that national character is influenced and formed by national surroundings is here gloriously contradicted, since, as far as I am aware, no Swiss has ever attained to eminence in anything. They are a little toy people, who live in little toy towns, and make excellent chocolate, and run innumerable hotels on the most economical principles. But even then they do not (as one would expect) get very rich. They are never 'very' anything. 'But the chocolate is excellent,' said Helen to these speculations.

It requires faith this morning to believe that in a few hours we shall be crunching the dry, powdery snow beneath our feet, and before sunset be skating or gliding down the white frozen road, with puffs of snow coming from the bows of the toboggan, for here all down the shore of the Lake of Thun the country is brown and grey, with scarce a streak of white to show that it is winter. Low overhead are fat masses of dirty-looking cloud, but between them (and this is the door where faith enters) are glimpses of the perfect azure which we expect up above. Now and then the sun strikes some distant hillside, or, like a flashlight, is turned on to the waters of the lake, making of them a sudden aquamarine of luminous green. But the weather is undoubtedly mild; the eaves of the wooden toy-stations drip with discouraging moisture, and Interlaken, when we reach it, wears a dreadful spring-like aspect, and people are sitting out of doors at the cafés, and appear to find it relaxing.

Then the first of these wonderful winter miracles happened. There was the flat alluvial land at the end of the lake, across which ran the fussy little light railway which should take us above (so we hoped) the region of cloudland. Grey and puddle-strewn was it, with here and there a patch of dirty snow stained through with the earthy moistness beneath. A low-lying mist was spread over the nearer distance, which melted into the thicker clouds of the sky itself. It was just such a view as you shall see anywhere in the English fen-land during February.

We were looking at this with, I am bound to say, a certain despondency. It seemed almost certain that we should find dull weather (which means thaw) up above, when a sudden draught from some funnel of the hills came down, making agitation and disturbance both among the low-lying mist and the higher clouds. The former was vanquished first, and, torn to ribbons by the wind, and scorched up by a sudden divine gleam of sun that smote downwards, disclosed in its vanishing the long, piney sides of an upward-leading gorge. The higher clouds, being thicker, took longer to disperse, I suppose, for at its farther end the gorge was still full of scudding vapours. Then suddenly they cleared, and high, high above, a vignette of fairyland—the Jungfrau herself, queen of the snows—stood out in glacier, and snowfield, and peak, against a sky of incredible blue. There she stood in full blaze of sunshine, the silver-crystal maiden, donned in blue, enough to open the eyes of the blind, and make the dumb mouth sing.

Then afterwards, as the little Turkish bath of a train went heavenwards, how magical and divine a change happened! Inside the steamy carriages, smelling of railway-bags, and rugs, and forgotten sandwiches, it was not possible to see through the condensation on the window-panes, but the blood that trots through the body knew the change, and took a more staccato note. Then—I suppose that travelling stupidity had seized us both—it suddenly occurred to Helen that we might, without fear of prosecution, put the windows down, though by a printed notice of by-laws of the railway it was still defended that we should not agitate ourselves out of it. Once a ticket-puncher, exactly like a figure out of Noah's ark, put them scowlingly up again; but with the boldness that this whiff of mountain-air supplied, we again lowered them, after a further consultation of the by-laws.

The ineffable change had begun. Soon for the moistness of the lowland there was exchanged a hint of frost—something that made outlines a little more determinate, a little crisper. Then, as we mounted higher, there was further change. For dripping twigs of the trees there were trees that showed a hard, white outline of frost; for the sullen muddy stream there was clearer water, that went on its way beneath half-formed lids of ice; and thinner and thinner above our heads grew the grey blanket of cloud.

Then that, too, was folded away, and above us was the sun and the sparkling of the unending firmament. Below it had been like a London fog, when

you cannot see the tops of the shrouded houses; now we saw the roofs of the world, the Queen Anne's mansion of Europe, all clean, all clear, just as they were when I saw this land three years ago. No tile had slipped, no chimney-pot required repairs. The top of the world was good. Oh, how good!

The clear dry air, the sunset lights on the peaks, the liquid twilight (keen as snuff to the nostril), from which the sun had gone! There was the rose-tinted Wetterhorn, black Eiger, flaming finger of Finster-Aarhorn; or, on more human plane, the hiss of skates over the perfect ice, the passage of a toboggan, with a little Swiss girl holding in front of her a baby sister, and steering with her heels, and shrilly shouting '*Achtung!*' There was 'Madame' who keeps a restaurant (I do not know her name), standing to see the train-passengers come in, and shaking hands, and saying, 'You shall have wings to-morrow, no legs' (alluding to an amiable altercation of three years ago, when I drew a kind but firm sort of line about eating chickens' legs for lunch on four consecutive days); and there was the beer-man, whose admirable beverage I always drank at 11.30 a.m., being thirsty with skating; and there was a skater I knew, who attempted a rather swift back-bracket for the admiration of the new arrivals by the train to see, and fell down in a particularly complicated manner in the middle of it; and there was the barrack of an hotel which always smells of roasting leather, because people put their skates and boots on the hot-water pipes, and right above it was the Mettelhorn; and to the left was the Lady

Wetterhorn ; and to the right the smooth, steely-looking toboggan-run down into the valley. ' Oh, world——' I beg your pardon.

I have omitted to mention the magic word on our luggage-labels, ' Grindelwald.'

Three years ago, I must tell you, among other foolish and futile deeds, I made a *cache* underneath a particular tree on the path leading to the Scheidegg, consisting, as far as I remember, of chocolate, coins, and matches. These insignificant facts I published in another place, and since then I have received every winter mysterious letters from Grindelwald, showing that other people are as absurd as myself. My *cache*, in fact, has been found (I gave directions which I hoped would be sufficient), and it has been, so these letters tell me, enriched by other secret and beautiful things. There has been placed there, on separate occasions, by separate passionate pilgrims, all manner of store, and the very next morning, instead of going to skate, Helen and I skulked off with a toboggan to see what we should find. A poem on the Wetterhorn, so I had been informed, was there, to form the nucleus of a library ; there was a tin of potted meat and some caramels for the larder ; and furniture had been added by a third person in the shape of a lead soldier and an ink-bottle, while the exchequer, I knew, also had been enriched by at least half a franc in nickel pieces. We had debated earnestly last night as to what to add to the establishment, if we found it, and eventually decided on a handkerchief, which is to be regarded by passionate pilgrims as

a tablecloth, a reel of cotton, and a copy of 'Shirley' in the sixpenny edition, to swell the library shelves. This latter was in a small linen bag, to keep it from the wet.

Of course, we did not expect to find all the objects that I had been informed had been placed there from time to time, for the rule of the *cache* is that you may use what you find there, provided only you replace it with something else. The potted meat, for instance, one could not expect to go undiscussed, and I cannot personally conceive leaving caramels uneaten. But in place of those, if only passionate pilgrims had played the game, we should find other objects. Thus the *cache* becomes a sort of exchange and mart—a reciprocal table laid in the wilderness, where you take one dish and replace it with another.

How it all savours of romance to the childish mind! With agitated fingers you scoop away the earth and moss which forms the entrance to the *cache*, under a pine-tree on the empty, frozen hillside, and you know you will find treasure of some kind, but what it is you cannot possibly tell. And inviolable secrecy must surround and embellish your manœuvres: the *cache* should not be mentioned at all except discreetly to the elect, for it partakes of Freemasonry, the masons of which are those who delight in idiotic proceedings. But just as three years ago I gave the inventory of the *cache* as it was then, so, in the minds of the idiotic, there may be felt some interest as to its inventory when the founder again revisited it. *Caches*, of course, are socialistic in spirit, and anybody may appropriate

whatever he chooses; but I should be glad if the copy of 'Shirley' is left there. It is such a pleasant book to read after lunch, if you are tobogganing alone. A book, at any rate, is rather a good thing to have in a *cache*, and the wishes of the founder will be satisfied if another book is put there instead. But let us have a book. I should prefer that it should not be the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

The morning, I think, must have been ordered on purpose, for I can imagine nothing so exquisite being served up in the ordinary way, *à la carte*; such weather must have been specially chosen. Not a single ripple of air stirred; an unflecked sky was overhead, and the sun, as we set off, just topped the hills to the south-east, and sat like a huge golden bandbox on the rim of them. The frost had been severe in the night, but in this windlessness and entire absence of moisture no feeling of cold reached one. There was in the air a briskness of quality more than magical; it was as if made of ice and fire and wine, and in a sort of intoxication we slid down into the valley. Then, crossing the stream, since there was water about, it suddenly seemed desperately chill; but no sooner had we mounted a dozen yards of ascent again than the same dry kindling of the blood reasserted itself. Toboggans will not run of their own accord uphill, so I put ours under my arm, and for a hundred yards we danced a *pas de quatre* up the trodden snow. We both sang all the time, different tunes, when suddenly we saw a clergyman observing us from a few yards ahead. He had a wildish and severe eye, and we

stopped. David before the Ark would have stopped if he had unexpectedly come on that man. He was sitting in the snow, and wore a black hat, black coat, and black trousers, but he had yellow boots. He kept his eye on us all the time that we were within sight, and seemed to have no other occupation. We neither of us dared to look round till we had left him some way behind, neither did we dare to dance again. Eventually I turned my head to look at him from behind a tree. He was still sitting in the snow, not on a rug, you understand, nor on a toboggan, nor on any of the things upon which you usually sit in the snow. He was not breakfasting or lunching or looking at the view. He was sitting in the snow, and that was all. I have no explanation of any kind to offer about this unusual incident. Helen thinks he was mad. That very likely is the case, but it is an interesting form of mania. Perhaps by-and-by we shall have an asylum for snow-sitters. Or is it a new kind of rest-cure ?

It is astonishing how you can argue about things of which you know nothing. Indeed, I think that all proper arguments are based on ignorance. If you know anything whatever on the subject of which you are talking, you produce a fact of some kind, which knocks argument flat. It is only possible to reason rightly on those subjects concerning which no fact, except the phenomenon itself, is ascertainable. Had we asked the clergyman why he sat in the snow, he would probably have told us, and the subject would have ceased to interest us conversationally. As it was, we held heated debate

upon him, just as if he was the Education Bill, for a long time. But the unusualness of it merited attention and conjecture. And think how divine an opening for conversation at dinner-parties, if you know nothing of your neighbour, and have not caught her name.

'Did you ever see a clergyman sitting in the snow?'

That, in fact, was the outcome of our argument. No theory about him would really hold water. He was probably a conversational gambit, which might lead to much. For instance, in answer to your question, your interlocutor might reply in five obvious ways:

1. 'I once saw a clergyman, but he was not sitting in the snow.'

2. 'I have seen snow, but I never saw a clergyman sitting in it.'

3. 'I once saw a clergyman being snowballed.'

4. 'Yes. What are your views about the best treatment for the insane?'

5. 'Such strange things happen at Grindelwald. Did you know——'

Yes; he was probably a conversational opening made manifest to mortal eyes. Anyhow, when we returned he was not sitting there. If he had been real, he probably would have been—at least, if you once sit in the snow there is no reason why you should ever get up. Obviously it is your *métier*.

Now, everybody who lives in fogs and rainy places will fail to understand anything of these last deplorable pages. But if they go to the thin clear

air of Alps in winter, they will know that this sort of thing (given you have the luck to see a clergyman sitting in the snow) is invested with supreme importance. When the hot sun shines on ice, it produces some kindly confusion of the brain ; there is no longer any point in trying to be clever or well-informed, or witty, or any of those things that are supposed to convey distinction down below to their fortunate possessors : you go back to mere existence and joy of life. It is a trouble to be consecutive or conduct a reasonable argument ; instead, you open your mouth and say anything that happens to come out of it. Most frequently what issues is laughter, but apart from that, the only conversation you can indulge in is preposterous, and the only behaviour possible is childish. That is why I love these roofs of the world. The intoxication of interstellar space is in the air. Everything is so light—you, your body, your mind, your tongue, your aims and objects. The only things that you take seriously are the things that do not matter : the snow-sitter was one, the *cache* was another. But as we got nearer the *cache*, we became even more solemn than on the question of the snow-sitter. There was no telling what we should find there, even if we found the place at all. The tree might have been cut down since last year; the whole *cache* might have been rifled by some imperceptive hand. There was no end to the list of untoward circumstances that might have despoiled us.

And so we went through the wood : we came to the end of it, and there was a tree—' of many one,'

as Mr. Wordsworth prophetically remarked. On its roots were cut my humble initials: it was certainly The Tree.

'Oh, quick, quick!' said Helen; 'let us know the worst!'

The root had arched a little since I saw it last. Moss and snow were plastered on it in a manner scarcely natural. I plucked the bandage away with hands that trembled. We found:

1. A pencil.

2. Something sticky, which I believe to have been the caramels.

3. An empty potted-meat tin, with a wisp of paper inside it, on which was written: 'I ate it. Quite excellent.'

4. A candle-end.

5. The famous poem on the Wetterhorn done up in canvas. (How laudable!)

6. A Jock-Scot, salmon-trout size.

7. A paper on which was written: 'What's the point?'

8. A cigarette, very sloppy.

9. A five-franc piece, wrapped up in paper, on which was written: 'I took 4.50 away.'

10. A little wooden pill-box containing a very small moonstone.

I think we were very moderate in our exchanges, which is right, since you must always leave the *cache* richer for your presence, and we merely took away the pencil and the poem on the Wetterhorn, leaving our handkerchief, the reel of cotton, and the copy of 'Shirley.' Below the question 'What's the

point ?' we wrote, ' None, if you can't see it,' and added, ' The founder and his wife visited the *cache* on January 12, 1907. They saw a clergyman sitting in the snow. Selah.'

Then an awful thing happened. Even while these treasures were openly and sumptuously spread round us, down the path there came a merry Swiss peasant about a hundred years old. He looked at us and the treasures with curiosity and contempt, and then burst into a perfect flood of speech, of which neither of us understood one single word. When he stopped, I said politely, ' Ich weiss nicht,' just like Parsifal, and he began it, or something like it, all over again, with gesticulations added, and in a rather louder tone, as if he was talking to a deaf man. Until this torrent of gibberish was let loose on me, I had no idea how much there was in the world that I did not know; so with the desire to reduce *his* opinion of himself also, I addressed him in English. I said ' God save the King ' right through, as much as I could remember of ' To be or not to be ' from the play called ' Hamlet,' and had just begun on ' When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,' when he suddenly turned pale, crossed himself (though it was a Protestant canton), and fairly fled down the path. I make no doubt that he thought he had met the devil. Anyhow, he had met his match at unintelligible conversation.

But it was clearly no use running risks, for more of the merry Swiss might come down the path, who, it was conceivable, might not be so much impressed by unintelligible sounds, and we hurriedly reburied

the treasure, ate our lunch, and turned the bow of the toboggan homewards, since we proposed to skate all afternoon. It was a year since I had been shod with steel. I burned for the frozen surface. But it was right to see to the *cache* first. There are some things you cannot wait for.

We spent three weeks in these divine futilities, if anything so utterly enjoyable can be considered futile. For my part, I do not believe it can, since, as I have already said, to enjoy a thing very much, supposing always that it does not injure anybody else, is a gilt-edged investment of your time; for enjoyment is not (as is falsely supposed) finished with when the thing itself is done and over, for it is just then that the high interest of it (though gilt-edged) begins to be paid. Until one forgets about it (and by a merciful dispensation one remembers what is pleasant far longer and far more keenly than what is painful), subsequent days and hours are all enriched, and therefore made more productive, by these pleasurable memories. It is here, I think, that a wonderfully fresh and vivid student of the human mind—namely, R. L. Stevenson—goes all wrong when he says that the past is all of one texture. It seems to me—one is only responsible for one's own experience—to be of two textures, one strong and the other weak; and the strong one is the memory of things you have enjoyed, of happy days; the other of times when, for some reason or other—pain, or anxiety, or fear—the lights have been low, and the sound of the grinding not low, but loud. The human mind, in fact, is more reten-

tive of its pleasures than of its pain. In the moment of the happening either may seem the top note of acuteness, but the echoes of the one indisputably live longer than the echoes of the other ; and though our consciousness, if you care to look at it that way, is largely a haunted house of the dead hours, yet happy ghosts are in preponderance, and seem solider than the shadows of its dark places ; also (and this, I think, too, is indubitable) the anticipation of happiness is more acute than the anticipation of a corresponding pain. In the future there are two textures also, as in the past.

Since our return this contrast has been rather markedly brought before me. There are many things I much look forward to ; at the same time, there is something ahead which I am dreading. What it is I do not know. I think I should dread it less if I did. But it is, though quite certain, quite vague. I connect it, however, with that evening in September when I heard my name called, and when Legs saw something which has since been expunged from his memory. And here is the contrast : the happiness that lies stored for me in the hive of the future is more potent than the bitterness that is there. Both are coming—of that I am sure —and among the many very happy things which I know and expect, I feel there is something I do not yet know which is happier than any. It is futile to guess at it. One might make a hundred guesses, and each would seem feasible of accomplishment. But there, at the back of my mind, are these two transparencies, so to speak—one sunlit, the other

stormy—and it is through them that the events of the day are seen by me. They colour—both of them—all I do ; but the happy one is the predominant one. They do not neutralize each other ; they are both there to their full. But I despair at giving coherently so elusive a picture as they make in my own mind. But, though elusive, it is intensely real, and for the first time I neither can, nor do I desire to, speak to Helen about this thing which is so often in my mind. It is incommunicable.

But after these Swiss weeks there was not much time for me to think about this, as it was imperatively demanded, by reasons over which I have no control, that I should exercise my mind on the extremely difficult art of the composition of English prose, which incidentally implies doing two things at once ; for not only have you to invent your lively and inspiring tale, but you have to tell it in a certain way. You may choose at the beginning any way of the hundreds that there are of telling it ; but in the key in which it is originally pitched, in that key it has to remain all the time. As a matter of fact, it probably does not, and goes wandering about in other modes and scales ; but every book ought to be in the one key in which it opens, just as a picture ought to be in one key. It is within the writer's liberties, of course, to write other books in other keys, and I think he is perfectly justified in largely contradicting in one work what he has unhesitatingly affirmed in another, but in each his point of view has to be consistent throughout.

The thing is not quite so easy as it sounds, and it

is further complicated by a very real difficulty. Every story that is worth reading at all is bound to record change in the characters and general attitude of the people with whom it deals. The jaded author has to keep his eye on each, and see that he behaves after some atrocious battering with which fate has visited him in a different manner than before this visitation took place. If he is living in any sense of the word, the event will have altered him. He will view things differently, and therefore behave differently. Yet all the time he is the same personality. It were better for him that he should be as adamant to the blows of circumstance than that the inner essence which is individuality should be uncertainly rendered; and, like the dexterous Mr. Maskelyne with his spinning-plates, the scribe has to keep his eye on all his puppets to see that none lapse into stagnation, and to poke them up with his industrious pen.

It is here that the complicated question of consistency comes in which just now is worrying me to bewilderment. Dreadful and stinging events are happening to a most favourite puppet of mine. Providence is dealing with her in a cruelly ironical manner, in a way that makes the poor distracted lady take quite fresh views of a world she thought so warm and kindly. Yet it must be the same personality which has to be shown sitting behind these changed feelings and directing them all. That is the consistency that has to be observed. Otherwise it ceases to be one story, but becomes a series of really unconnected short stories, with the technical

absurdity that the heroine in each has the same name.

Yet there is this also : it takes all sorts to make a world (at least, a world otherwise constructed would be an extremely dull one), but It, It itself, Life, lies somewhere in the middle of us all, and is the centre to which we approach. We, the all sorts which make the world, view it very differently, though we are all looking at the same object. And here a simile, a thing usually unconvincing, may assist. What if in the centre there is something like a great diamond, blazing in the rays of the sun ? I, from the south, see soft blue lights in it ; you, from the west, see a great ruby ray coming out of the heart of it ; another on the north says, ' This diamond is emerald green '; while from the east it seems of transcendent orange. So far, it is quite certain that we are all right, for the world, so to speak, refracts God, making Him many-hued, even as white light is refracted by the triangle of a prism. And then let us suppose circumstances enter and shift me, who have been on the south, where I saw blue, to the west, where I see red. The whole colour of the world is changed to me, and yet there is no inconsistency. The same Ego honestly sees a changed colour. There would, on the other hand, when my place was shifted by circumstance, be grave inconsistency if I continued to declare that I still saw blue. I do not. My eyes tell me it is red. Just now my eyes told me it was blue. But *I* have not changed, nor has the great diamond changed ; it is merely that the refracted light has taken another colour.

It is just that which one must perceive in the telling of a story. A person who sees blue all his life probably sees nothing at all, nothing, anyhow, in the least worth recording. He is bound as the wheel of circumstance goes round to see things in other lights. But that is not inconsistency ; it is the truly consistent. Who wants, after all, for ever to draw the same conclusion from the same premises ? Only fossils, and possibly molluscs.

But pity the sorrows of the story-teller ! The *quality* of the red has to be of the same quality as the blue. The same fire which strikes to the south will indubitably strike to all other points of the compass, and when X is wheeled north, he will not see the same green as Y sees there. He saw it through the alchemy of his own mind ; it will be green, but nobody else's green. Or if it is, he has no individuality to speak of. At least he belongs to a type that sees everything through the eyes of others. That is generally labelled conventional, and there seems no reason to change the name.

How I laboured during those last ten days of January, and how little result there seems to be ! Only—I console myself with this—the real labour of writing does not chiefly consist in the effort of putting things down, but in the moral effort of rejecting them. There is nothing easier than to fill pages and pages with improving reflections or inspiring events. But having done that, it is necessary to sound the tuning-fork and see if, as I said at first, the story is in tune, if the key is kept.

Usually it is not. On which the fire ought to make to itself a momentary beacon, or the waste-paper basket be replete. But the pile of numbered pages should in any case be starving. That, as a matter of fact, is my sole argument that I have justified my existence during these ten days. I have really worked a great deal, and the waste-paper basket could say how generous has been its diet. I have really left out a very great deal, and I hasten to forestall the critic who will say that I should, in order to act up to this excellent standard, have left out the rest. I do not agree with him.

The key of which I have spoken has to be preserved, not only in matters of consistency in character-drawing, but in style as well. If you lead off with verbiage from the Orient, the East must continue, I submit, to dye your paragraphs till the last page is turned. Though you may have also at your command pure wells of the most limpid simplicity, you will have to reserve them for some other immortal work; they will not mix with the incense and heady draughts from the East. Or should you fancy a mysterious Delphic mode of diction, Delphic you must be to the end. But—as if all this was not so difficult, that, like Dr. Johnson, we almost wish it was frankly impossible—inter-woven in your Delphic or Oriental narrative there must be a totally different woof—namely, the thread of the spoken word, the speeches that you put into the mouths of your various characters. And the written word, be it remembered, is never

like the spoken word; the two vocabularies, to begin with, are totally distinct, and though I would not go so far as to affirm that the spoken word ought to be ungrammatical, it should, if it is to recall human speech, be colloquial, conversational. In interchange of ideas by means of the mouth real people do not use fine language, especially when their emotions are strongly aroused. Then, instead of becoming high-flown and ornate in their speech, real people go to the opposite extreme, and instinctively use only the very simplest words. When this is stated, it seems natural enough, but you will find it very seldom practised. Novelists have a tendency to let their puppets employ magnificent high-sounding words to express the intensity and splendour of great emotion; in fact, you may gauge the strength of their emotions, as a rule, by the sonorous quality of their adjectives. I believe the very opposite to be the truth of the matter; people in the grip of passion do not use beautiful or highly-coloured words; above all, they do not, like Mr. Wegg, 'drop into poetry.' Yet nothing is commoner than to find prose degenerating into blank verse in the spoken records of emotional crises, as if blank verse was a sublime form of prose. Little Nell is continually half-way between prose and poetry, so also is Nicholas Nickleby when his indignation is roused. In fact, in some of his scenes with Ralph they both forget themselves so much in their passion that torrents of decasyllabic lines flow from their lips. But, on the other hand, the language of narrative should undoubtedly grow more coloured, more vivid

in such descriptions as are the setting of some very emotional scene. Yet it should not depart from its original key. . . . Well, as Mr. Tulliver said, ' it's puzzling work talking.'

But though the days have been so full, I have seen everything, everything through the two transparencies that seem drawn between external happenings and me.

FEBRUARY

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THE seasons, according to the literary and artistic view of things, have been rather out of joint this year. The autumn was not a time of mellow fruitfulness at all, because all the green things upon this earth had exhausted themselves in the long hot summer, and had no more spirit left to be fruitful with. Then January in England had been of the usual warm mugginess and mists which poets say are characteristic of autumn, but which in reality characterize winter. Indeed, I doubt if winter was ever a time of hard frosts and sparkling snow, which is the artistic ideal, and I am disposed to believe that that version of it was really brought from Germany by the Prince Consort, and popularized by Charles Dickens. Then after the mists came the mellow fruitfulness, for I myself saw strawberries in flower on February 2, and on February 9 Helen came in saying she had found a real strawberry. That was strange enough, though perhaps the finding of an unreal strawberry would have been stranger still, so I said, 'Where?' and she said, 'On the strawberry beds, silly.'

Therefore I started up, leaving a most important and epoch-making sentence unfinished (and I have

never been able to remember what the end of it was going to be), because I wanted to see the strawberry, and write to the *Field* about it. So she said, 'Are you going out already?' and I said, 'Yes, just to see the strawberry, and write to the *Field*, saying I have.'

Then she pointed to half-way down her person (since we are so abstemious of words that indicate the anatomy below the throat), and said:

'Would X rays help?'

Being extremely clever that morning, of course I understood, and reviled her for eating an unnatural phenomenon. It was criminal; she might as well have found the sea-serpent or the North Pole, and eaten it. But as usual she was artful, and led the conversation away to daffodils, which were behaving in a manner nearly equal to that of the strawberry-plant. One, indeed, was in bud (a thing incredible, but true), and I supposed she had eaten that, too. That led us back to the strawberry again, which she was not even sorry about, for she said it was far more interesting to be able to write to the *Field* to say she had eaten a strawberry on February 9 than that I should be able to say I had seen it. So I very kindly gave her my pen, and said:

'Write quickly.'

She said:

'Oh, but I am only a woman; I can't. They wouldn't put it in.'

'I wish you hadn't put the strawberry in,' said I.

'I think I shall wish that, too, before long,' said she.

I only mention this in order to show the utter unreasonableness of my wife. If I want to write to the *Field*, and say there was a strawberry in my garden on February 9, she will allow me to say that though I did not see it, she ate it. (She certainly would not have eaten it if I *had* seen it.) But she will not write to say she ate it, like a true woman. She says it does not matter, but added with a changed voice that she was afraid it might. It did, for the fruitfulness of the season was not so mellow as might have been wished.

Yes, once again spring has begun to stir in the fiery heart of the world; once again the breath of Life blows the embers that seemed all winter to be but grey and lifeless cinders, and from the centre the glow spreads, till that grey surface of ash is alive with flame again. And as the flames shoot upwards they are like rockets, rising from over the whole face of the world. At present they are but going upwards, those slender lines of flame, which are the sap that is rising through branch and leafless stem until it reaches the very ends of the twigs. Then these rockets will burst in stars of leaf and opening flower, till the vast illumination is again complete. But in the warm soft February morning, though I feel and know that this is so, I cannot help my thoughts going back to the other side of things. What of the illumination of last year? It is quenched, dead, and even while the world is getting ready for the next one there still lie broadcast the ashes and fallen sticks of the last rocket-shower.

However many more gladden the world, even though to all infinity life was incessantly and beautifully renewed, yet I cannot forgive the perishing of a single flower. I know well that the material is indestructible, that of life and the death of it is born fresh life, so that we are quite right to say that life cannot be destroyed. But what of the individual rose, what of that one purple star of clematis that twinkled on the end of the stem I hold in my hand? Though it may be transformed, and will be transformed, into a myriad other things, so that by its death it is transfused into a hundred other flowers, and courses through the veins of life for ever, yet it, that individual object, will be seen no more. Its individuality is completely lost; it figures in new forms, not its own.

It is quite certain also that the same things happen to our bodies. The grass grows thick on the graves of those we have loved, and the roots of the roses penetrate deep. I saw once on the crumbling, sea-devoured East Coast of England the thing itself under my very eyes, which made it real to me in a way that nothing had ever done before. For a churchyard stood there on the very edge of the sandy cliff, and one night, with noise of huge murmurous thunder, an acre of it slid down into the sea. Next morning I visited the place, and there, sticking out of the cliff, were the bones of the dead that had been buried there. A ruin of roses that had sprawled and trumpeted over the churchyard gate, which had been plucked in half by the fall, lay on the ground, and I wondered how the trees had not

slipped with the rest of the landslide, until I saw. Their roots had lain just where the fracture of the earth occurred, and in the exposed face of the new cliff I saw their anchorage. One was wrapped round a thigh-bone, another had made a network among ribs . . . it was all horrible and revolting. And that has happened to the million dead who have lived and loved, whose limbs have been swift to move, who have drawn rapturous long breaths of this keen sea-scented air, whose eyes have been bright and mouths eager when they met, lover and beloved. This is all—this ruin of red roses on the grass.

There is nothing in the world more certain than this, and one may as well face it. Helen will die, and I shall die, and one of us will die first. And the other will sometimes see a grave with the grass green over it, and roses triumphant thereon. For we have settled most things at one time or another, she and I, and the manner of our funerals and what happens after has passed under discussion. We have decided definitely against cremation, because it seems such a waste of tissue, and we are both of us going to be properly buried, the one close to the other, so that the same rose may bloom from us both. But she *will* have roses and strawberries on her grave, so that the Sunday-school children may pluck and eat them, while I, on the other hand, am going to be a spring-man, and have daffodils, for I feel no leaning, as I have said, towards Sunday-schools. Here lies the difficulty: she wants a rich clayey soil for her roses and strawberries, and my daffodils will demand not clay but sand. Also

she is going to plant purple clematis by my head, and clematis likes sand too. We have not yet perfectly decided where we are going to die, but it seems probable that the survivor will stay in the same place as the survived. But I want purple clematis, since it was when I saw that that I knew somebody whom I had thought to be a friend was false. Indeed, I have done all I could to forgive, but I think a clematis that feeds on me may make it surer.

Our funerals will shock the neighbourhood, I am afraid. I am going to have the A flat Fugue and Prelude blared on the organ (it is time somebody began to learn to play it) at that distressing moment when my coffin is wheeled out of the church, simply to show that I have enjoyed myself enormously. Great Heaven ! I should as soon think of having a dead march of whatever kind played over me as I should let them play the works of Mr. Mendelssohn. I shall have had (whatever happens) an immensely good time. It seems to me much fitter to return thanks for that than to remind people that my poor body is dead, which they knew already, or why did they come to my funeral service ? As for requiems, I will have none of them. Whatever happens, *I*, my body at least, cannot possibly lie quiet in my grave. The dear flowers planted there will see to that.

Oh, my God, my God, what unanswerable riddles you set us ! Even this body, and what happens to it, is so occupying a subject. I don't really care what happens to mine : it may be set up in an ana-

tomical museum if it will teach anybody anything; but Helen's. . . . Somehow, when I come out of the valley of the shadow, something of that must wait for her; or, if she has gone through that passage first, I shall not know myself unless at the end of it, when the darkness lifts a little, I shall see grey eyes looking at the procession of those passing over, and meeting mine, and saying somehow, 'I am here.' She must be there (is it not so?) waiting on the eternal shore for me.

There she must be. I can't help what I believe; that is the one thing in oneself which one can never change. And Dick will be there, and Margery . . . what a splendid day!

Then the one horrible certainty descended on me again. In so few years we shall all—our bodies, I mean, the appearance by which we recognize each other—not be our bodies at all, but part of the fibre of other living things which are having their day, even as we have had ours. It is so now with Dick and Margery, so how shall I *know* them? Are they to be just voices in the air, presences that are felt? Is that all? Shall I never see again that quiver on Margery's mouth, which means that a smile is ready to break from it? I don't want incorporeal presences. I want Dick and his crooked nose, and Margery's smile. . . .

Then, on this warm February morning I must suppose that I went down into Hell. Dead leaves and flowers, it was certain, were transformed into fresh living forms, the bones, too, and flesh of dead

animals, and of men and women, passed again into the great machine of life, and were served up in new transformations, so that of the individual body nothing at all was left. That is bad enough ; I shall never see Margery and Dick again as I used to see them. Helen will pass, too, into other forms . . . that is bad enough. But this is infinitely worse. What of the individual soul, the spirit that we love ? Will that, too, as analogy grimly insists, be put back again into the principle of eternal life from which it came, so that its identity, too, is lost, and lives but only as the autumn leaves of last year live in the verdure of the next spring ? With everything else that happens ; the bodies of those we love even, a cruel thing surely, but certainly true, are used up again to make fresh forms of life. Why should we suppose that God makes any exception in dealing with the souls of men, the individuals ? Every other form of life He uses and re-uses . . . the world is but a lump of modelling clay, with which He beguiles the lesiure of eternity, making now one shape, then crushing it all up and making another.

So this is all that the promise of Eternal Life amounts to, that we shall pass back into the crucible, and issue forth again as bits of somebody else ! It seems to me a very mean affair ; frankly, it seems a swindle. It is a poor trick to make us puny little creatures love one another, and try to be kind, and console ourselves for the evil days and the sorrows of the world with thoughts of the everlasting day that shall dawn for us all, if that everlasting day is nothing more than the day that is here already ; if

the souls whom we have believed are at rest in some ineffable peace and content, or, on the other hand, through further suffering are getting nearer, ever nearer, to the perfection and flower of their being, have already passed into other forms of life, so that Dante and Beatrice are themselves no longer (as we should call 'themselves'), but have been infinitely divided into soldiers, sailors, tinkers, and tailors. In that sense they may be said to be alive still, but it is a very paltry sense. *They* (what we mistakenly call 'they') are as dead as if they had never been.

It is all very well to say that Dante is immortal by reason of his deathless verse ; that is all very well for us, but how is it for that fiery soul which is split up into a thousand other bodies ? When he thought to open his eyes on the Mystical Rose as the dark waves of death slowly drew back from his emancipated spirit, it was all a dismal mistake. No Beatrice awaited him ; she, too, is split into a million other forms of life. They were absorbed back into the central fire, and a spark of Dante's soul went into this man, and another into that, so that in this sense there is eternal life for him. But in no other ; the Dante which we mean was formed out of other lives, and into other lives he went. The man is there no more, and there is no Beatrice. There will be nothing of us either, unless you mean that at some future time I am alive because part of me has become perhaps a murderer, and another part a politician, and another a housemaid, for all I know.

The February sun was warm ; you might almost

call it hot. A little wind pregnant with spring moved through the bushes; the snowdrops, those pale heralds of the triumphant march of the new year, were thick in the grass where we had planted them, Helen and I, last autumn, so that they should give us the earliest news of the returning tide of life. And to me this morning they brought but bitter news, for they spoke not of the returning of life, but of the thousand deaths which made them alive. They pointed not forwards towards the glory of the many-coloured summer, but back to the innumerable decay of the autumn. And the quiet garden which I loved, the tiled mossy roof which I had called home, became the place of death, even as last autumn death had called to me from it, and had been seen by Legs, and had made the dog howl. Was it this that was hinted at by those dim forebodings which for months had never been absent from me? Was the fear that crouched in the shadow ready to spring taking form now? It seemed to me that the logic which had turned the world to hell was irrefutable; I expected some shattering stroke that should blot out sunshine and sensation from me for ever, proving that I and my logic were right. I had guessed the horrid secret of the world; I was like a spy found with the plans of the enemy's fortress on me, and must die, lest I should communicate them. I said that to myself; I said 'Enemy's fortress,' meaning the world where I had loved and been loved. 'Enemy,' mark you; I knew what I meant. The world was the enemy's fortress.

And then, thank God—oh, thank God!—before that which was impending happened, I said to myself that I was wrong. I did not at the moment see where I was wrong, but I knew that I must have made some gross and awful mistake. Things could not be as I had imagined them. And the moment I said that to myself the darkness lifted a little. It was all dark still, but the quality of the darkness changed. And then, unbidden as a tune that suddenly rings in one's head, a few words made themselves recollected. And they were, 'If I go down into hell, Thou art there also.'

At that I caught a glimpse again of this dear garden and house, as I had seen and known them. I do not suppose that this blackness and loneliness of spirit which I have tried to indicate could have lasted more than a few minutes, as measured in the world of time, but time has nothing to do with the spirit. In a second, as computed by the unmeaning scale of hours and days, the soul may live a thousand lifetimes or die a thousand deaths. Redemption may be wrought there in an infinitesimal fraction of a moment, or in that same fraction a soul may damn itself. For it is not the moment which is anything: it is the instantaneous choice which therein sums up the infinite series of deeds which one has already done, and thoughts which one has harboured. And the message that leaps round the world on electric wires is a sluggard to choice. My choice at this moment was between the truth of what I had been elaborately thinking out and the truth of the words that rang in my head. There

was reason on one side ; there was just It on the other. And what was 'It'? Just that which, very faintly, but quite audibly, said that I had come near to blasphemy. There are many names for it : we all know its visitation, though it is obscured sometimes because we encourage the Devil, who comes to us all in many forms, and can take the most respectable disguises, like those of intellect and mind. But perhaps the simplest name and the truest for It is the Grace of God.

Then, in the same moment (I am lumbering in words, and trying to express what I know cannot be said), I saw that Helen was already half-way across the grass, coming towards me. She held a telegraphic sheet in her hand, and there was in her face a gravity infinitely tender, and quite quiet, and quite normal. I had seen it there once before, when the news came of her father's death, which was sudden.

'Legs won't come down this afternoon,' she said gently. 'We have got to go up to him.'

And then she showed me the telegram.

It was not many hours before we knew all there was to be known. Legs had started to ride down from town, and turning into the King's Road from Sloane Square his motor bicycle had skidded, and he had fallen under an omnibus. A wheel had passed over him.

He had a letter or two, which identified him, in his pockets, and he had been taken, since it was so near,

back to the house in Sloane Street. When we got there he was still alive.

His room was at the back of the house, and we were allowed to go in at once. He lay there, quite unconscious, and in no pain, for the only thing that could be done for him was to keep him like that. The bedclothes were not allowed to touch him, and a round wooden frame was under them. There was no hope at all.

His bed ran out into the middle of the room, and Helen and I sat one on each side of it, while a little distance off was the doctor, who just watched him. Sometimes he got up and looked at him, sometimes he softly left the room, returning as quietly. And in those hours of waiting, for a long time I was conscious of nothing except the trivial details of the room itself. I suppose I had been there before—ah! yes, of course, I had, when Legs had the influenza in the winter—but it was not familiar. Yet it was just like what I should have expected Legs' room to be, and in a moment I found I knew it as well as I knew him. There was a pile of letters on the writing-table, a bag of golf-clubs in the corner, an enormous sponge on the washing-stand, and on the dressing-table a most elaborate shaving apparatus—a metal bowl, a little Etna for hot water, a half-dozen razor blades in a neat case, with a sort of mowing-machine handle. He had not packed them, since he was only going to be with us for a couple of days, and he could never have used all those blades once each on that smooth chin. . . .

He had been, as I remembered now, to a fancy-dress ball the night before, and his wardrobe, gaping open, showed the hose and ruffles of the Elizabethan period, while hanging up by them was a small pointed beard and a high head-top, with long and rather scanty brown hair. 'For the point is,' Legs had said rather shrilly, 'everyone will say, "Shakespeare, I presume," and I shall say, "How dare you? I am Hall Caine!" And if some people are a little cleverer and say, "'The Bondman,' I suppose?" I shall say, "You seem to have forgotten William Shakespeare." Perhaps you don't think it funny. But then, you see, you are not going to the ball.'

No; we had not thought it very funny, and Legs had been rather ruffled. He told us we had spoiled his pleasure, but if so, it must have very quickly become unspoiled again, for—it was only a week ago that he had conceived that idea—he spent a boisterously hilarious evening afterwards. But, how I wish we had not spoiled his pleasure even for that moment! As if it mattered whether it was funny or not, so long as it amused him. Helen had said it was rather a cheap sort of joke. . . . And just then her eyes, too, saw the fancy dress hanging up in the wardrobe, and the moment afterwards she looked across to me. And then she left the room for a little while. She, too, I am sure, had thought of that.

I had a friend once who was killed in a railway accident. A year afterwards I was staying with his mother, and one evening, when we were alone,

she began crying gently. 'Jim took his lunch with him to eat in the train that day,' she said to me soon, 'and he had asked me to put him up an orange. But I forgot.'

That is the pathos of little things. Yes, you dear soul, weep a little over the forgotten orange, and let Helen weep a little because she said Legs' joke was cheap. And then let us think of the bigger things—the love and the loving-kindness that have been ours, that bright, boyish spirit that made mirth in the home. Even now let us try to thank God for what has been. You know what Legs was to us—a sort of son, a sort of brother.

All that afternoon we sat there, hearing London rumble distantly around us, and little stirrings and creakings came from different parts of the room. Now the blind flapped, now a curtain sighed, or, as often happens in spring-time, a board of the flooring gave a little sharp rap, some infinitesimal particle of sap still lingering in it, perhaps, and hearing the heralds of spring blowing their horns outside. Only from the bed there came no sound at all: he was still sunk deep in that sleep which the doctor hoped would join and be one with death. If he woke at all, there was the chance that he would suffer blinding, excruciating pain. On the other hand, he might come to himself, just at the last moment of all, when pain would be already passed.

The doctor was saying this in the hushed whisper with which we speak in the chamber of death, though there may be no real reason why we should not speak openly, when I heard a little stir from the

bed, and, looking round, I saw that Legs' eyes were open, and that he was moving them this way and that, as if in search of something. Helen had seen, too, and next moment she was by him. He recognized her, for there was welcome in his eyes, and then, turning his head a little, he saw me. The doctor meantime had moved to the head of the bed and looked at Legs' face very intently. Then he made a little sign to me that I should come up to the bed, and he himself went and stood by the window, looking out.

And I understood.

Then Legs spoke in his ordinary voice.

'Wasn't it bad luck?' he said. 'My bicycle skidded, and the omnibus——

'What is happening to me?' he asked quickly. 'Is it——'

Helen laid her hand on his head.

'Yes, my darling,' she said. 'But you are not afraid, are you?'

For a moment the pupils of his eyes contracted; then they grew quite normal again.

'No,' he said quickly. 'I've had an awfully good time. Oh, and it was a great success—Shakespeare, you know.'

Then a shadow seemed to pass over his face and his eyelids fluttered.

'Now? Is it coming now?' he said.

'Yes, my darling,' said she again, and kissed him.

Legs lay quite still for a moment with closed eyes. Then he quickly opened them again, and made as if he would raise his head.

'Buck up, you two, won't you?' he said.

From outside there came the dim roar of London, and little noises crept about the room. But from the bed came no sound at all.

Two days afterwards we went down home again, arriving in the evening, and the body rested that night in his own room down here, to be taken next day to the churchyard, which the sun blesses more than any other place I have ever seen, and over which the grey Norman tower keeps watch. His last charge to us had been to 'buck up,' and I do not know how it was, but it seemed to us both as if he was still liking us to 'buck up.' So, in so far as we found it possible, we did what Legs wished us to do.

But to-night he would have been here, making the third of a merry table, and when the servants had come in for the last time, bringing us coffee, it was not possible not to remember that, and Helen rose. And when she spoke, her voice trembled.

'Is it very foolish of me?' she asked. 'And do you think Legs will mind? But I feel as if I can't face to-morrow, unless I go and look at the place where we shall put him. It is quite warm outside, Jack. Oh, let us go out and look at it. It will seem more natural then. I think I shall "buck up" better if I see it first.'

So we went across the garden, and through the place of roses, and through the gate on the far side, and through the field which bounded the churchyard. There was a great yellow moon just risen,

and shadows were sharp-cut, so that there was no doubt when we came to the place that had been so newly dug. His uncle, Helen's father, lay there; the two graves were side by side.

So we sat there in silence for some time, very still, for a rat ran on to the mound of earth by the graveside, and sat there, smartening itself up, brushing its face and whiskers with nimble paws. The shadow of the tower swung just clear of the place, and sharp-cut in the light was that oblong hole in the ground. There was nothing as yet to be said, for Helen was crying quietly to herself, and I could not stay those loving tears. Once she said to me: 'Oh, let us buck up!' But then she silently wept again.

You see, I know Helen. I knew that there was nothing of bitterness in her crying. Tears of that sort were not opposed to the bucking up. Legs did not mean that he wanted us not to miss his dear companionship. He only wanted us to stand up and be cheery, not be bitter or broken. But since Helen felt she could face to-morrow better if she faced the scene of it, why, that was all right; it was bucking up.

Then in a few little sentences we talked of the next day. There should be the A flat Fugue—no funeral march—and we would have no funeral hymns, but just one Psalm, 'The Lord is my Shepherd,' and one hymn after all that had to be done was over; so then we would sing 'Adeste Fideles,' Helen thought, for it is always Christmas since the first Christmas Day.

Helen just moved as she sat there on the edge of his grave when we had settled this as if to go home again, but——

And then I told her all that I had thought three mornings ago—all the doubts that merged into certainty, all the logical conclusions. Whether I then at that moment inclined more to the side of the devil or of God I do not know, but in any case I told her all ; and then she put her arms round me.

'Yes, dear,' she said, 'but in hell He is there also. And we are all there sometimes, and it is but the lowest step of the beautiful stair to heaven.'

The moon had swung behind the tower, and we sat in the darkness of its shadow.

'It is all so simple,' she said. 'It all depends upon what you believe, not what you think or what you reason about. Do you believe that we bury Legs to-morrow ? Do you believe that he is dead, or that he has ceased to be an individual ? You may reason about it, and ask me, as you asked yourself, how you will recognize him if his body has become grass and flowers ? I am quite content to say that I have no idea. You see, one doesn't know all God's plans quite completely, and sometimes we are apt to think that if one doesn't know the plans about a certain thing He hasn't got one. We put our intelligence above His. That is a mistake.'

And we sat in silence again ; then Helen spoke, asking me an extremely simple question.

'What does faith mean if you are right about it ?' she said.

'It means nothing. It is without meaning.'

'And are you prepared to abide by that?'

Again there was silence. She sat a little apart from me, so that her questions came from the darkness; they were put impersonally, so to speak, not by Helen, but just by a voice.

'Do you believe that Margery and Dick are nothing now except grass and flowers, and perhaps a little bit of the lives of other people? Do you really believe it? And is Legs nothing now?'

It was quite still. We had come to a very sequestered corner of the great house of life to talk about these things. In front was the shadow of the grave, and over it now lay the shadow of the tower. Once from the grave's side a few pebbles detached themselves and fell rattling to the bottom, and I had no answer to this. Three days ago I had asked myself the same questions, and what I call my brain answered them; but now it gave no answer. Something, I suppose, had made it uncertain.

'How can the wheel of an omnibus hurt Legs?' she asked. 'It can do no more than hurt his body.'

Then she came closer to me again.

'And what does love mean?' she said.

I think Legs must have enjoyed his funeral next day, because it was so extremely funny, and I think by this time that you know enough about him and Helen and me to allow us all to be amused at it. We had sent a note to our Vicar saying that we should like the A flat Prelude, and the Psalm, and the hymn which I have mentioned. He came in

person, not to remonstrate, but to put on to us the correcter attitude. Death was a solemn occasion. There was none so solemn, and the Hymns Ancient and Modern provided some very suitable verses to be sung—'Now the labourer's task is o'er,' for instance. (Legs a labourer, who was the most gorgeous player at life that has ever been seen!) Besides, surely a Christmas hymn was out of place, when it would be Ash Wednesday in no time. I said feebly that a Christmas hymn was surely always in place; but dear Mr. Eversley looked pained, and Helen at once yielded. She was sure that the 'labourer's task' was most suitable.

Then about the Psalm. There were two Psalms already provided for the Burial Service, and surely '"The Lord is my Shepherd" struck a different note.' So said our Vicar. That was undeniable. And when should we sing that Psalm? Then Helen was firm, and said that we thought we should go back into church at the end of the service, and—well, just sing it. It was rather good to end with. But Mr. Eversley looked even more pained than before. He had never heard of such a thing being done. That point was left undecided for the moment, for there was clearly something even more crucial to come.

It came.

Ever since the organist had heard of Legs' death he had been most diligent at Chopin's Funeral March, of which he had of his own initiative bought a copy in order to be able to perform it. The organist in question, who was also the schoolmaster, had had a

sort of distant adoration for Legs ever since a year ago he had seen him drive a golf-ball two hundred and sixty measured yards. Since then Legs had played with him once or twice, giving him enormous odds, and the distant adoration had ripened into a nearer one. 'He was such a pleasant young gentleman,' was the upshot of it. And the dear man had bought Chopin's Funeral March, since he wanted to play something 'more uncommon' than the Dead March in 'Saul'!

Here Helen and I were completely at one. There should be no A flat Preludes; it was to be Chopin's Funeral March.

There remained the question of the Twenty-third Psalm. Oh yes, it would strike a different note, that was quite true; so there would be no going back into church, but we should have Chopin's Funeral March and 'Now the labourer's task is o'er.'

The Vicar did not exactly beam when these things were settled, but he was visibly relieved. He shook hands with us both, and said:

'Terribly sudden, terribly sudden. At two precisely.'

(Oh, Legs, how you would have enjoyed that! We did, too, for you told us to buck up. And it was so funny, after all we had planned!)

The Vicar's call had been made quite early, and it was scarcely twelve when he went away; but to us both it seemed as if Legs had been waiting somewhere upstairs till he went in order to laugh over it with us. It was as if he had been waiting on the landing, fresh from his bath, with just a dressing-

gown on, so that he could not appear when other people were there, but might come down barefooted when they had gone. He must have been so amused at it. How he would skip into the drawing-room, afraid of prowling housemaids, to find us alone, and say, 'Sorry I haven't got much on, but I had to come down after my bath.' Yes, after his bath. It was so that it seemed to us. That wholesome spirit had been washed, we thought, by what is called death. It was fresher, more jubilant than ever. And on the Vicar's departure down he came to join us again. I have no other words for it.

There was more to come, for hardly had the Vicar gone when it was announced to us that Mr. Holmes had called, and might he see one of us for a moment only. I felt that Legs was cornered now. He would have to stop here, hide behind the piano or something. I hoped he would behave himself, and not make me laugh. So Mr. Holmes came in.

I never saw anybody so wonderfully attired. He was all in black, including his gloves and his stick, and above his small neat buttoned boots when he sat down I saw a black sock. That may only have been accidental, but no accident would account for the fact that his cuffs had a neat black border about half an inch wide. I wondered if he had blacked himself all over like the enthusiastic impersonator of Othello.

He had ventured to intrude on our grief, but only for a moment. Here Helen dropped her handkerchief, and they both bent down to pick it up and

knocked their heads together, and I almost thought I heard a little stifled gasp from behind the piano. But Mr. Holmes had received no notice of the funeral, which he had understood was to be to-day, and did not know if we wished it to be quite private ; if not, he would esteem it a privilege to be allowed to pay his last respects. And here little Mr. Holmes gave a great gulp, and could not get on.

'I did like him so much,' he said, after a moment. 'Two. Thank you, I can let myself out !'

And he walked away on tiptoe, as if it was most important not to make a noise.

It was one of those sparkling February days, sunny and windless, and the air was full of the chirruping of birds. There was a moment's pause at the gate of the churchyard, a moment's silence. Inside the church the organ ceased ; then came great simple words :

'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

MARCH

MARCH

HELEN and I have a failing, though you may not have thought that such a thing was possible. It is a foolish weakness for old bits of rubbish. We can neither of us without anguish and unutterable rendings bear to throw old and useless things away. The weakness has to be got over sometimes, but we keep putting the work of destruction off, just as one puts off a visit to the dentist, with the result that when it comes to pass we find that it would have been far better to have done it long ago. However, if we did not occasionally tear things up, and throw things away, the house would become uninhabitable, so this morning we vowed to each other to spend the hours till lunch in the work of destruction. Our rubbish collects chiefly in the room that is called mine, where she has a knee-hole table with nine drawers. She opened these one after the other. They were all full, and despair seized her.

'I can't,' she said. 'Here are nine drawers all quite full of heart's blood. O Jack, look!'

And she brought across to me a photograph I had taken of Legs jumping the lawn-tennis net. He was sitting in the air apparently in an easy attitude

One knee seemed crossed over the other, and his mouth was wide open.

'It will be harder than ever this year,' she said, half to herself. 'And there are nine drawers full!'

'Circumscribe the drops of heart's blood as they come,' said I. 'Don't think there are nine drawers full. Only keep thinking of the particular thing that has to be kept or thrown away.'

'Oh, but it's only the fact that there are nine drawers full that makes it possible to throw anything away at all,' said she.

'Hush, woman!' said I.

Personally, I am extremely methodical over the work of destruction. I clear a table and dump upon it a pile of heart's blood. This I sort into three heaps, one of which is for destruction, one for preservation, and one for further consideration. I proceeded to do so now.

There were many pieces of string. Throughout the year I keep pieces of string, because I know I shall use them. As a matter of fact, when I want a piece of string I cut it off Helen's ball, and never use any of the bits that I have saved, because I don't know where they are, and they would prove to be the wrong length if I did. So on the day of destruction I consign them to the dust-bin, and begin to collect again immediately. Then there was a pill-box full of soft yellow powder, which Legs and I had collected from the little cedar-cones at some house where we were staying in the autumn. That I put on to the heap of destruction, but trans-

ferred it to the heap of consideration. Then there were a dozen little bits of verd-antique which I had picked up years ago on the beach at Capri, and which I had periodically tried to throw away. But I never could manage it, and this morning, knowing it was useless to strive against the irresistible, I made no attempt whatever to steel myself to their destruction, but put them at once into the pile that was predestined unto life. There was a chunk of amber that I had picked up at Cromer, equally imperishable ; yards and yards of indiarubber tape that is the filling of a rubber-cored golf-ball ; a small bottle with a glass stopper, clearly impossible to throw away, since it might come in useful any day, and how foolish I should feel if this afternoon I wanted a bottle with a glass stopper, and had to send into the town for one, whereas, if I had been less iconoclastic, I might have airily produced the exact thing needed out of the left-hand top drawer. Then came a little tin box full of pink powder, which I concluded was rouge. This was puzzling.

'When did I use rouge ?' I asked Helen.

'I don't know. Was it Legs', do you think, when he acted the Red Queen last year ?'

No, I couldn't throw that away. The Red Queen had been a piece of genius. And next came the telegram from him to me saying that he had passed into the Foreign Office. Then there was a vile caricature of myself at the top of my so-called swing at golf—quite unrecognizable, I assure you, but . . .

Then came a mass of letters, receipted bills, and accounts rendered. Accounts rendered always fill

me with suspicion, and I have to hunt among unpaid bills to find the items of the account rendered, as I feel a moral certainty that this is an attempt to defraud me. But they are invariably correct. But these and the receipted bills, which had to be docketed and tied up together in a bundle, took time. Probably, however, I could tie them up with one of those many pieces of string which I had so diligently collected. By a rare and happy chance I found one that would do exactly, and tied them up with a beautiful hard knot, and put them on the predestination heap. A moment afterwards I found several more to join the same packet, split my nail over trying to untie my beautiful knot, and had to go upstairs for nail-scissors to cut it smooth, and brought them down to cut the knot. No other piece of string in my collection would do, and so I cut a piece off Helen's ball, for she had left the room for the moment.

Then I came upon a large quantity of boxes of fusees, all partly empty. How it happens is this: I go to play golf on a windy day, and, of course, have to buy at the club-house a box of fusees. These, on my return, or what remains of them, I methodically put in a drawer on reaching home. By an oversight I forget to take them out again when I play next day, and so buy another box, which I similarly place in a drawer. And if you play golf four or five times a week on these downs, where there is almost always a high wind, it follows that in the course of a year the amount of partly filled boxes of fusees which you collect about you is

nothing short of prodigious. I did not know how great a supporter I was of home industries.

My methodical mind saw at once how these had to be treated. Of course, throwing them all away was out of the question, and the right thing to do was to produce out of every dozen of partly filled boxes some eight or nine completely full. This plan I began to put into practice at once.

It was necessary, of course, to find how many matches a full fusee-box contained, but they are awkward to pack, and some seemed to hold ten and others only seven ; so when Helen came back, the table was covered, among other things, with fusees. So I waved my arms violently, and said : ' You shall not !' This was because the female nose, and the male nose if it is unaccustomed to tobacco-smoke, likes, positively likes, the smell of fusees ; but to anyone who smokes tobacco the smell of them is, for some reason, perfectly nauseating, and that is why we only use them in the open air.

Then Helen's mean nature asserted itself. She said, ' Oh, I forgot you don't like the smell,' and soon after (not at once, mark you) called my attention to some non-existent object of horticultural interest out of the window. I turned, and in a moment she had lit a fusee, and positively inhaled the sickening perfume of it. I only wish she had inhaled it all.

The upshot was that we took a turn on the lawn, while the room with open door and windows recovered from its degrading odour.

' How were you getting on ?' she asked.

'Not very well. I decided to destroy some string. I nearly destroyed a pill-box with some cedar-flower dust in it. But I reserved that. At least, I think I did.'

'Why?'

'Legs and I collected it, and I know Legs wouldn't have thrown it away, so I can't.'

Helen was silent a moment; then,

'Do you miss Legs very much?' she asked. 'His bodily presence, I mean, of course.'

'Of course I do, just as you do. I miss him all the time. Oh, he is in the room, and he laughs at us, or with us. I know that.'

'Then what do you miss?' she asked.

'The young body about the house.'

Then Helen said: 'Oh, you darling!'

That sort of remark is always extremely pleasant, but I had no notion of her artfulness. I am glad to say that she has often said it before, so that it was not particularly stupid of me not to guess that it meant anything especial. And with her artfulness she changed the subject to that which I happened to be thinking about, thus making no transition.

'I gave up,' she said. 'I found all my things were so connected with Legs that I couldn't destroy them. It is just what you said. We want to keep the young thing in the house, since we are getting old—yes, it's no use saying "Pouf!"—and I can't destroy anything connected with him. So shall we move our rubbish straight into Legs' room, and make a sort of young museum? Then, when we

feel particularly middle-aged, we can go up there and sit among the young things. If we don't do that, we must clear out his room as well, and I can't see how we can. There are rough copies of letters to that dreadful Charlotte ; there is a letter in his handwriting, there on his table, beginning——'

'Beginning "You're a damned fool!"' said I, '"but I don't intend to quarrel with you." Did you mean that one ?'

'Then you have been there, too ?' she said.

'Why, of course, every day. I go when you attend to household affairs after breakfast ; you go when you say you are going to bed. Didn't you know ?'

'Certainly I did, but I thought you didn't know that I went there,' she said.

'Ditto,' said I.

There was a huge rushing wind out of the south-west, and we stood a little while inhaling the boisterousness of it. All spring was in it, all the renewal of life.

'How Legs is laughing at us !' she said.

'I don't care. Let's have the museum of young things. Let's put there all the things we can't throw away. Oh, Helen, there are photographs, too ! There is one of him in his last half at Eton. . . . There is one of you and me when the Canadian canoe sank gently, and as we stood dripping on the shore he photographed us. And I photographed him and you when you said you would skate a rocking-turn together, and fell down. Heart's blood, heart's blood ! There ought to be

a law which makes it a penal offence to keep photographs.'

I suppose I had got excited, for Helen took my arm and said :

' There, there !'

But even that did not do.

' Oh, the pity of it,' I cried—' the pity of it ! Why didn't he take a train to come down ? Why didn't that omnibus pull up ? He was ours, and he would have married, and still been ours, and there would have been young things about the house again.'

I suppose I had torn away from her, for now we were apart, facing each other, at the end of this ; and she smiled so quietly, so serenely.

' Do you think that I don't feel that, too ?' she asked. ' Can't you see that the wife who is mother of nothing must feel it more than the husband who is father of nothing ? Besides, you make your books—you are father to them. What do I do ? I order dinner.'

And yet—it seems to me so strange now—I did not see. There was bitterness in her words, but all I thought was that there was no bitterness in her voice, or her face, or her smile. I did not quite understand that, I remember, but Helen has told me since that she did not mean me to. She wanted —well, her plan evolves itself.

And then she took my arm again.

' It is nearly a month since dear Legs went away,' she said, ' since we have actually heard and seen him. The last we heard was that he wanted

us to buck up. Do you know, I think we have bucked up. But we have been doing that singly; we have somehow lived rather apart, dear. Surely it is better to buck up together. I think the idea of a young museum is a very good one. Let us put all the things we can't throw away into his room. We have never used the room before, because Legs might always rush down and want a bed; and so let us keep it like that. We might call it the nursery.'

And so the young museum was started. Helen had all manner of tender trifles for it, all connected with Legs. She had all sorts of things I had known nothing of: little baby garments, Legs' bottle, some baby socks. Then there were child things as well: 'Alice in Wonderland,' the depressing Swiss family called Robinson, a far better Robinson called Crusoe.

And thus the nursery grew. 'Treasure Island' went there; a rocking-horse, which I remembered of old days, was brought down from an attic. Oh, how well, when I saw him again, I remembered him! He had a green base, nicely curved, on which he pranced to and fro, and my foot had once been under it when he pranced, so that I lost a toenail, and was rewarded with sixpence for stopping crying. He had a hollow interior, the only communication with which were the holes of the pommels, and on another dreadful day my sister had dropped a threepenny-bit into one of them, with some idea of making a bank. A bank it was, but the capital was irrecoverable. The coin was still there, for now I took

up the whole horse with ease, that steed which had so often carried me, and heard a faint chink from his stomach. He had a wild eye, too, and flaming red nostrils, and the paint smelt just the same as ever. And Helen produced a Noah's ark, in which the paint was of familiar odour, but different, and there was Ham without a stand, and Mrs. Noah in a neat brown ulster, and Noah with a beard, and one good foot, but the other was a pin. Elephants were there with pink trunks (I never could understand why), and enormous ducks with pink bills (which now threw a light on the colour of the elephants' trunks, since I suppose that a brush full of pink was indiscriminately bestowed), and small spotted tigers, and nameless beasts which we called lynxes, chiefly because we did not know what they were, and did not know what lynxes were, so they were probably the ones. The ark itself had Gothic windows, and a mean white bird, with a piece of asparagus in its mouth, painted on the roof, probably indicated the dove and the leaf.

We must have spent two days over the nursery, and during those days we concentrated there all the young things of the house, and when it was finished it was a motley room. There were photographs of Legs everywhere; all his papers were kept; everything that had any connection with Legs and with youth was crammed into it. And when it was finished we found that we sat there together, instead of paying secret visits to the room, and we played at Noah's ark, sitting on the carpet, and played at soldiers, clearing a low table which had

been Helen's nursery-table (for you cannot play soldiers on the floor, since they stagger on a carpet), and peas from pea-shooters sent whole rows of Grenadiers down like ninepins. But we could neither of us ride the rocking-horse, so instead we tilted him backwards and forwards, and pretended he was charging the foe.

Of course, all reasonably-minded readers will say we were two absurd people. We both of us disagree altogether. For you have to judge of any proceeding by its effects, and the effect in this case was that Legs' injunction that we should 'buck up' became a habit. That inimitable youth which Legs gave the home, he, his bodily presence, had gone. But somehow the atmosphere was recaptured. We played at youth, at childhood, till it became real again. For a household without youth in it is a dead household; a puppy or a kitten may supply it, or an old man of eighty may supply it. But youth of some kind must be part of one's environment. Else the world withers.

Another thing has happened to me personally. I have said that at the beginning of the year I looked forward into the future through two transparencies, one sunlit, the other dark. But now the dark one (I can express it in no other way) had been withdrawn. Dear Legs' death was not quite identical with it, for it was not withdrawn then. But during the month that followed it gradually melted away. I can trace just two causes for it.

The first was this: In ineptitude of spirit I had reasoned to myself that the death of the body

logically implied the merging of the life into the one central life. But after his death Legs became to my spirit more individual than ever. And the second cause was this establishment of the nursery. Though youth might have passed for oneself, it still lived. One was wrong, too (at least I was), in thinking it had passed from oneself. Else how did I feel so singularly annoyed when Helen shot down with a wet pea a whole regiment of my Life Guards ? I was annoyed ; I am still. It was a perfect fluke that the Colonel on horseback fell in such a way that he more than decimated his own regiment. And I am sure Helen shook the table, else why should the Brigadier-General, posted in the extreme rear, have fallen off the table altogether ? She won.

Meantime in this first week of March the winds were roaring out of the south-west, and for a while, days together sometimes, squalls which the Valkyrie maidens might have bridled to make steeds for their swift going came in unbroken procession from the Atlantic. Helen is a lover of the sea, and these gales coming out of the waste of waters touch something within her as mysterious as the sixth sense of animals, who feel and are excited by things that the five-sensed mortal is unaware of. To-day, however, was quiet and calm, and we stormed the steep ascent of the downs till we stood on the highest point of the Beacon, which looks down on all other land towards the south-west, so that the river of wind that flows from the Atlantic comes here unbreathed and untamed by traverse of other country, and you get it fresh and salt as it was when it left the ocean.

In that interval of quiet weather there was nothing to be perceived by the ordinary sense, but she sniffed the air like a filly at grass.

'Wind is coming,' she said, 'the great wind from the sea. I don't care whether your little barometer has gone up or not; what does it know of the winds? We shall be at home before it comes, but I will tell you then, as we sit close to the fire, what is happening in the big places.'

She was quite right; though the silly barometer had gone up, we were but half through dinner when the wind, which had been no more than a breeze all afternoon, struck the house as suddenly as a blow. The wood-fire on the hearth gave a little puff of smoke into the room, and then, thinking better, suddenly sparkled as if with frost, as the passage of the air above the chimney drew it up. At that Helen's eyes were alight. She ate no more, but sat with her elbows on the table, while I, who have not the sixth sense, went gravely through mutton and anchovies on toast and an orange. Then they brought in coffee, and she shook her head to that. Meantime that first warning of the wind had been justified; a Niagara of air poured over us, screaming and hooting, and making a mad orchestra of sound. At times it ceased altogether—the long pause of the conductor—and then, before one heard the wind at all, a tattoo of the drums of rain sounded on the window-pane. Then, heralded by those drums, the whole mad orchestra burst into a great *tutti* of screaming, hooting, sobbing. So much I could hear, but Helen was *of* it somehow. Something

secret and sensitive within her vibrated to the uproar.

I have seen her in the grip of the wind, as she expresses it, perhaps half a dozen times, and it always makes me vaguely uneasy. It is no less than a possession, and yet I can think of no one whom I would have imagined less liable to such a thing. I can imagine her surrounded by the terrors of fire or shipwreck, or any catastrophe that overthrows the reason, and makes men mere panic-stricken maniacs, keeping absolutely calm, and infecting others by her self-possession. But now and then the wind takes possession of her, and she becomes like the Pythian prophetess.

'Oh, to be alone with the sea and the gale to-night!' she said. 'Jack, what splendid things are happening in the great empty places of the world! This has been brewing out on the Atlantic for a couple of days by now, and there are thousands of miles of great white-headed waves rising and falling in the darkness, and calling to each other, and dancing together. Up above them, as in the gallery of the ball-room, is the great mad band of which we hear a little in our stuffy house, and it will play to them all night and all to-morrow, and the waves will dance without ceasing, growing bigger as they dance, like some nightmare. Oh, you can imagine nothing! But I see so clearly Mr. and Mrs. Wave and all their family dancing, dancing, all young, though white-headed, and growing bigger as they dance. They are cannibals, too, and a big wave will eat up a little one, which

makes it bigger yet. The wind loves to see that. He gives a great blare of trumpets when he sees a cannibal wave. Oh, it must have happened this moment! That scream meant, "Well done, wave! That was a big one you swallowed!"

'Sometimes they see a ship coming along, and they love playing with ships, because all proper ships like being out in the Atlantic ball-room, and the waves crowd towards it, seeing which can lift it highest. Whiz! Can't you hear the screw racing, as the wave that lifted the stern runs away from under it? How the masts strike right and left across a thousand stars, for the sky is quite clear! The winds have turned out the clouds as you turn out the chairs and tables from a room where you dance.'

We had gone up to Legs' room after dinner, and as she talked she went quickly from place to place, now pausing for a moment to look at a photograph, now putting coal on the fire, or drawing aside the curtain to look into the night.

'Oh, there is the eternal youth of the world,' she said—'the song of the winds and the dance of the waves. I think all the souls of the little babies that are born come to land in the blowing from the sea. It is by that that vitality burns higher, and the fruitfulness of the world is renewed. Millions of blossoms of life are rushing over the land to-night, ready to drop into lonely homes——'

'Ah, don't, don't,' I said. 'Helen, come and sit down and be quiet.'

She paused for a moment opposite me, looking at me with her wonderful shining eyes.

'Not I, not I,' she said.

She still paused, still looking at me, still waiting for me to join her, as it were. And in that pause a sudden faint far-away light broke on me. She had said words which must have awoke in her, even as they awoke in me, the most keen and poignant sorrow that can touch those who love each other, and yet she was still smiling, and her eyes shone.

I got up. Something of that huge joy that transfigured her was wrapping me round also. The thrill, the rapture in which she was enveloped, began to encompass us.

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'It is for you to tell me,' she said. 'It must be done that way.'

'You said "ready to drop into lonely homes,"' I said.

'"So that they are filled with laughter,"' said she.

Then I knew.

'It is here,' I said—'the nursery.'

And at that the excitement, the exultation slowly passed from the face of my beloved, for there was no room there for more than motherhood. Though the wind still bugled and trumpeted outside, she heard it no more; the wildness of the dancing waves, grey-headed, growing waves, passed by outside her. . . . The blossom ready to drop filled her heart with the tenderness of the infinite deep love of the mother that shall be.

She sat there on the floor at my feet, with her arms round my knees and her head pillowed there.

'I have got to confess, too,' she said, 'though I am not ashamed of my confession. But don't allow yourself to be hurt, Jack. Just hold on for a minute without being hurt, and you will find that you are not. Now I shall hide my face, and speak to you like that. I have known it quite a long time: before Legs died I knew it.'

Well, I had to hold on for a minute or two, and not be hurt. If you think it over, you will agree it was rather a hard task that I had been set. On the other hand, about big things, about things that really matter, you must take my word for it that Helen is never wrong. But I had not been forbidden to ask a question.

'Then why did you not tell me?' I said.

Her head with the sunlit billows just stirred a moment, but she did not look up, but spoke with a hidden face.

'Because through all these weeks, my darling, you have been struggling against some bitterness of soul. You have made light of it to me, but I had to be quite sure it had gone from you before I told you this. I know what it was—it was the doubts you talked about to me when we sat one night at the edge of dear Legs' grave—when it was dug, but empty. And I had to be quite sure it had all passed from you before I told you this. I have not been sure till now, and—and I wanted you so much to guess. You nearly guessed, I felt, when we arranged this heavenly nursery.'

Then again there was silence, and I think I never knew till then how desperately difficult it is to be

honest with oneself. It is so much easier to be honest with other people. At the first glance I told myself I had got over the bitterness and blindness of which she had spoken when we talked together over Legs' grave, but gradually I became aware that I had not. Somewhere deep down, so that while the days passed it concealed itself from me, that bitterness had still been there. In this book, which has tried to be honest, you will, I dare say, find no trace of it since that night, but I had not probed deep enough. It had been there, and I think the days when we arranged the nursery finally expelled it. To-night, at least, I believed it was gone, and since Helen believed so, too, perhaps we are right about it. She, the witch, the diviner, had known me so much better than I had known myself all along.

All this took time, for the processes of honesty with me are slow. But there is no difficulty about the matter, perhaps, if the head you love best in all the world is pillowed on your knee. That is a stimulant, one must imagine. So at last I said :

' Yes, it's done.'

She came closer yet, and, like Mr. Holmes, we talked below our breath, in whispers, as if afraid of disturbing this great joy that had come floating down on us, borne on the sea-spray, borne on the wind-tide, borne as you will, so that only it came here.

Then, very soon after, she went to bed, and I was left sitting in the nursery, with its new significance.

Yet it was not quite new. I had, as Helen said, 'half guessed before,' and I but wondered, now I knew, how my imagination had halted half-way, and had not clearly seen the star on which Helen's eyes were fixed. Yet who would have known? She had been so full of art in her wording; even that master-word she had used, 'nursery,' seemed but to have slipped in, and I had thought she meant only—as, indeed, she had said—that it was to be the room of young things, where she should sit when the shadow of childlessness was chill, and with the aid of the memories of youth and play keep the mists of middle age from closing round us, and the frosts of old age from settling too stiffly on the later years of our travel. The room was to be but a palliative or a tonic, as you will, a consolation for the things that were not to be for us, and now it showed another face. It was not the past of which it spoke, but the future.

I suppose I sat long over the embers of the fire, but these were hours that had escaped from the hand of Time, and were not to be computed by his scale. Sometimes I threw a log into the open hearth of the fireplace (ah, but that open hearth must be altered now; it would never do in the nursery), and sometimes I plied an industrious pair of bellows, but for the most part I sat idle, looking into the fiery heart of the blaze; for the news that Helen had made me guess was at first unrealizable. Though I knew it to be true, I had to absorb, digest it, since a great joy is as stunning a thing as the stroke of

sorrow. And gradually, as gradually as the workings of the process of beauty, I began to feel, and not only to know, the name of the room where I sat. It was the nursery.

But Helen was wrong about one thing. She had said that the wind would play to the dancing of the waves all night and all next day, but before I went to bed that wild orchestra of the storm had ceased. Its work was done for us. It had blown the bud of the blossom of life into the house that so longed for it.

It is strange how quickly the events of life become part of one. Next morning I woke in full possession of the new knowledge. There was no question or uncertainty as to what that was which made a rapture of waking. And with the same suddenness all real knowledge of what life had been before I knew this had passed from me. I could no longer in the least realize what I had felt like before the moment came when Helen had made me guess. Though that moment was so few hours away, yet I could no more conceive existence without it than one can form any mental picture of what life would be without the gift of sight or hearing. It is not that any huge event destroys all that went before it, but it so stains back through the turned pages of the past that they are all coloured and suffused with it.

How the blackbirds and thrushes sang on that March morning! I had awoke before dawn to hear

the early tuning-up going on in the bushes, and before long, since I was too happy to sleep, I got up, dressed quietly, and went out. The tuning-up was just over, and the birds were all busy with breakfast, for you must know, as soon as they wake, they get in singing-trim for the day before they have their food. That done, they go on their bright-eyed quest, listening, with head cocked as they scuttle over the lawn, for the sound of a worm moving. They are so close to the ground themselves that they can localize this to within a fraction of an inch, and then in goes the spear-like beak, and the poor thing is dragged out of the soft, dew-drenched earth. They are not quite tidy eaters, these dear minstrels of the garden, for the point is to get your breakfast inside you, beyond recall, with the least possible delay. Swallow, gulp, swallow, and the thing is done. Then you give one long flute-like note of satisfaction, and listen again for the second course. But one cannot exactly say that they have bad manners at table, for the extreme sensibleness of the plan excludes all other considerations. Also, bad manners at table irresistibly suggest greediness, and no bird is ever greedy. They have excellent appetites, and when they have had enough they stop eating, and instantly begin to sing.

It was just at the end of birds' breakfast that I got out—that is to say, it still wanted some minutes to sunrise. The lawn was all gossamer-webbed and shimmering with dew, as if some thin layer of moonstone or transparent pearl had been veneered over emerald, and I felt it almost a van-

dalism to walk over it, removing with my clumsy feet whole patches of thin inimitable jewellery. The three-hour gale of the night before had vanished to give place to a morning of halcyon calm, and I augured one of those rare and exquisite days which March sometimes gives us—days of warm windlessness and the promise of spring. Straight in front of me rose the Beacon, still submerged in clear dark shadow, but high in the heavens above dawn had come, for it made a golden fleece—one such as never Jason handled—of the little cirrhus clouds that the gale had forgotten to sweep away. Dawn would soon strike the Beacon, too, but before that I hoped to stand on its top, and see the huge embrace of day and night, the melting and absorption of darkness into light. Even the river, with its waving waterweeds and aqueous crystal, did not detain me, and I gave but ten minutes to the ascent, for I wanted to welcome the dawn from a high place, to stand on the roof of the hills to greet it.

Slowly dawn descended from the sky, quivering and palpitating with light. The great golden flood came nearer and nearer the earth, which as yet caught but the reflection from the radiant heavens. It hung a moment hovering, the bright-winged iridescent bird of dawn, just above my head, and then the sun leaped up, vaulting above the eastern hills. The level shafts of light swept across the land, a mantle of gold, while in the valleys below the clear dusk still lay like tideless waters. But down the hill-sides strode the day, throwing its bright arms about the night, enfolding and encompassing it in

miraculous embrace, and I looked to where home was. Already the big elms in the garden were pillars of flame, then the roof burned, and suddenly the windows blazed signal-like. Dawn had come.

That was not half the miracle. Light had awoke, the hills were gilded with the sun, but at the touch of the gilding larks innumerable sprang from the warm tussocks of down-grass and aspired. A hundred singing specks rose against the sky, each infinitesimal, so that they seemed but like the little motes that swim across the eyeball, but these were living things with open throat that hailed the sunrise. Perpendicularly they rose, wings quivering, and throat a-tremble with song, till the eye lost them against the dazzling azure of day, and only enraptured voices from the air made the heavens musical, as if the morning stars sang together. Heaven made holiday. Its company of sweet singers and the gold of sunrise were one thing—the dawn.

Dear God, dear God, how I thank You for that indestructible minute! I knew now what the sunlit curtain that lay between the future and me was, and the very morning after I had known You let me see from this high place the birth of day. In this physical world there was reproduced that golden sunlit curtain. You made visible to me what my heart knew. And to me on the top of the Beacon the windows of my home flashed a beacon to me. And all was of Your making—the sun and the mounting skylarks, and down below the trees of the garden, and the beaconing, flushing window of my beloved, and the fruit of the womb. When I

come to die, I want to remember all that. Truth and Life were there, and the Way also. And what is the sum of those three things ?

Yet was I content even then ? Good heavens, no ! There were many beautiful things yet to be, and the glory of His gifts just lies in this—that there is always something better to come. This great bran-pie of the earth never gives to our little groping hands its best present. There is always something more. Your heart's desire is given you, but at the moment of giving your heart is enlarged, and you ask for something better yet. And if you want it enough, you get it. The only difficulty is to want enough. For you are not given, so I take it, things that you have not really desired. All sorts of bonuses come in, pleasant surprises, but the solid dividend is for the man who wills. There are fluctuations, of course, but to look upwards, without doubt, is a gilt-edged affair. I correct that. The edge is gilt, and so is the rest of it, and the gilt is laid over gold.

It was thus that I looked from the top of the Beacon, with the mist of the song of the invisible skylarks all round, and the blazing reflection of the windows of our room in the valley ; and there among the skylarks it seemed that Legs joined me. It was of no use to deny he was there, simply because it was silly to deny it. There is a French word—*revenant*—to express his presence, but even the solidity of that word failed to do justice. He had

never gone away, and so he could never have come back. He was with us all the time, and rejoiced in the arrangement of the nursery, even as he had been so hopelessly amused at the correctness of Mr. Holmes on the morning of his funeral.

And at the moment of this I expected the 'open vision.' Life, and death, and birth, the three great facts, were so near realization. Again I expected to see Pan peep over the brow of the Beacon, and to hear a flute-like song that was not of skylarks. I was ready—dear God, I was ready.

So I thought for the moment, but before the next had beaten I knew I was not. I wanted more—more of this divine world, more of what the next few months will bring. Should all be well when summer comes, I think I would choose to die now. And the moment I thought that I knew its unreality. I want to live through the beautiful years that will come. I want to have a son at Eton or a daughter who turns the heads of eligible youths. I want both, and more than both. Die! Who talked of that? I want to have a full nursery. I want to see Helen old and grey-headed, with grandchildren round her, and herself the youngest of them all. I want to live through the whole of this beautiful life till old age; and though that is called the winter of life, there is no need that it should be so. The last day of a man of eighty should be the most luxuriant of autumn, before the touch of winter has blackened the flowers; for it is only the thought of death that makes us think of old age and winter together, and the thought that does that conceives falsely of death.

So, anyhow, it seemed to me on this midsummer morning of March. I knew that all that was was kind. Pan smiled without cruelty, and if he smiled from the Cross, it was from the throne of ineffable light that he smiled also.

One by one the skylarks, sated with song, dropped down again to the sunlit down. Dawn had passed, and day had come, and—oh, bathos of bathos !—I was so hungry. If I had given but ten minutes to the ascent, I made but five of the reversed journey, and designed an early breakfast to make existence possible till Helen came down ; for it was yet not long after seven, and a Sahara of starvation lay between me and bacon. Yet, though I have said that this was bathos, I do not know that I really think so, since in this delightful muddle of life everything is so inextricably intertwined that bathos of some kind invariably is the sequel of all high adventure. The great scene is played, the sublime thing said, and then you have tea or take a ticket for somewhere. So I confess only to literary bathos, and to disarm the critic I may state that these quiet chronicles are not supposed to be literary at all, but merely the plain account of quiet things as they happened.

So I lingered for a moment after the knee-shaking descent was over to talk for a little, but not for long, with the river. There was a great trout just below the bridge, and I am sure he knew it was still March, for he wagged his impudent head at me, saying : ' I am perfectly safe. I shall eat steadily till April, and then observe your silly flies with a

contemptuous eye.' And though he was a three-pounder at least, I bore him no grudge. I don't think I wanted to kill anything that morning.

Then I crossed the further field, and came down into the rose-garden, still meditating on the immediate assuagement of hunger. But then I saw who stood there, and I meditated on this no more; for she was there.

'I got up early,' she said, 'and found you had already gone. Oh, good-morning! I forgot.'

'I shall never forget the goodness of this morning,' said I.

Then I saw that her eyes were brimming.

'Ought I to have told you before?' she said. 'Forgive me if I ought.'

In that first hour of day we came closer to each other than ever before. My beloved was mine, and the time of the singing-birds had come.

APRIL

APRIL

I MUST remind the indulgent reader, lest Helen and I should appear tediously opulent, that our Swiss trip in the winter was due to a windfall of a hundred pounds—a thing which may conceivably happen to anybody, and in this instance happened to us. Consequently, the fact that we went abroad again in April does not, if it is considered fairly, argue aggressive riches. In any case, I refuse to stoop to degrading justifications. We did not go because it was good for our healths, which were both excellent, nor because foreign travel improves and expands the mind. As a matter of fact, I do not believe it does, for the majority of travellers are always comparing the foreign scenes they visit with spots in their native land, vastly to the advantage of the latter, and the farther and more frequently they go, the more deep-rooted becomes their insularity. We went merely because we enjoyed it, and had formed a careful plan of retrenchment afterwards, being about to let the Sloane Street house for the three summer months. That was rather a severe decision to come to, since we both hate the idea of strangers using 'our things' and sleeping in our beds; but by these means this

expedition to Greece became possible, and when once it was possible it had already become necessary.

So here we sat this morning on the steps of the little temple of Wingless Victory, wingless, as the old sunlit myth said, because, when the nymph lighted on the sacred rock of the Acropolis, she stripped off her wings, which were henceforward useless to her, since she would abide here for ever, just below the great house of defence that the Athenians had raised to the Wisdom of God, Athene, who was born full-grown and in panoply of shield, and helmet, and spear, from the head of Zeus. Out of his head she sprang, in painless birth, with a cry that was heard by Echo on Hymettus, and rang back in Echo's voice across the plain, the shout of the wisdom of God incarnate.

And then Poseidon, the lord of the sea, who coveted these fair Attic plains, challenged Athene for the ownership thereof. Each must produce a sign of godhead, and the most excellent should win for its manifestor all the plain of Attica. There, high on the rock, where the great birth had taken place, were the lists set, and with his trident Poseidon struck the mountain-top, and from the dent there flowed a stream of the salt sea, which was his kingdom ; and then the grey-eyed goddess of wisdom laid aside her spear, and from the waving of her white hands there sprang an olive-tree, the sign of peace and of plenty. So Poseidon went down to his realm again, where no man may gather the harvest ;

for none could question which was the more excellent sign.

It was after this, after the Athenians had raised the great house to the Wisdom of God, that Wingless Victory came to abide here. It was not fit, for all her greatness, to build her a house on the ground that had been given to Athene, so just outside the gates they made this platform of stone, and raised on it the shrine that looks towards Salamis.

Fables, so beautiful that they needed no further evidence of their truth, sprang from ancient Greece, as flowers from a fruitful field. Whether they were true or not, whether that peerless woman's form that stands now in stone in the Louvre, alighting with rush of windy draperies on the ship's prow, ever was seen here by mortal eye, or whether the myth but grew from the brain of this wonderful people, matters not at all. Beauty, according to their creed, was one with truth, just as ugliness was falsehood. They denied ugliness : they would have none of it, and it was from the practice of that conviction that there rose the flawless city of art. Never, so we must believe, during that wonderful century and a half, when from the ground, maybe, of the lifeless hieratic Egyptian art there shot up that transcendent flower of loveliness, of which even the fragments that remain to us now, battered and disfigured as they are, are in another zone of beauty compared to all that went before or has come afterwards, was anything ugly produced at all, except as deliberate caricature. It was no Renaissance—it was Naissance itself—the birth of the beautiful.

On every side shot out the rays of the miraculous many-coloured star : from the marble of Pentelicus flowed that torrent of statues which make all others look coarse and unlovely, for the speed of the Greek eye was such that they saw attitudes which pass before we of slower vision have perceived them. Sometimes they saw things that were in themselves ungraceful, but how Pheidias must have laughed with glee when, among the seventy horses of the great procession on the frieze, he put in one that, cantering, stood upon one leg, while the other three were bunched underneath it. Taken by itself, it is a grotesque ; taken with the others, it gives to the jubilant procession of youths and horses the one perfect touch. More than two thousand years ago a Greek saw that ; two thousand years later we with our focal planes in photography can say he was right.

In all arts the Greeks were right : they cut through the onyx of the sardonyx, leaving the lucent image in the sard ; in the less eternal clay they made the statuettes of Tanagra—those sketches of attitudes so natural and momentary that, looking, we can scarcely believe that they do not move : where a woman has already made up her mind to take a step forward, but has just not taken it ; where she is in act of throwing the knuckle-bones, but has yet not thrown them ; where a boy has determined to push back his chiton (for the day is hot), but has just not made the movement. You cannot hope to understand the Greek genius, unless you realize that our eyes are snails as compared with

theirs. They saw with the naked eye what our instantaneous photograph now tells us is the case.

And of their paintings! We have none left (and there's the pity of it) which even reflect the Greek master at his best. But corresponding to our English paintings on china, we have the Greek vases of the fourth and fifth centuries. They were made by journeymen in potters' shops, but there is not one that lacks the supremacy of knowledge and observation. It is as if a china-shop in the Seven Dials suddenly displayed in its window examples of the nude figure which showed a perfect knowledge not only of anatomy, but of the romance of movement. The sculptors and painters of Greece saw perfectly. Even our academicians themselves appear to us to be not flawless. But in Greece we are not dealing with these great lords of colour and drawing: we deal only, as far as drawing goes, with little people in back streets. The noble church of St. Paul in the City of London, which so few people visit, was lately decorated. At this moment I look on a sketch of a fragment of pottery. . . . It is by one like whom there were thousands. It happens to be perfect in draughtsmanship.

To think of one day in ancient Athens! In the morning I went up (I feel as if I must have done this) to see the new statue of Athene Promachos, which Pheidias had just finished. We knew little then about his work, except that he had been chosen to decorate the Parthenon, and those who had seen his sketches for the frieze (which we can see now in the British Museum) said that they

were 'not bad.' So after breakfast my friend and I strolled towards the Acropolis, talking, as Athenians talked, of 'some new thing'—in fact, we talked of several new things, and, being Athenians, we got quite hot about them, since we had (being Athenians) that keenness of soul that never says 'I don't care about that,' or 'I take no interest in this.' Everything was intensely interesting. It was a hot morning and the plane-trees by the Ilyssus looked attractive, and there was a company of people there whose talk might be stimulating, but to-day we were too busy: we had to see the Athene Promachos, a bronze statue by Pheidias, forty feet high, and after lunch (lunch was going to be rather grand, because a new play was coming out, and Pericles was going to be there, and perhaps Aspasia) we were going to Æschylus's new tragedy, called the 'Agamemnon.' And my friend, who was Alcibiades, was giving a supper-party in the evening. Socrates was coming, and a man who was really very pleasant, only he listened and made notes, but seldom talked. His name was Plato.

Alcibiades was rather profane sometimes, and spoke of the great gods as if he did not really believe in them. I, knowing him so well, knew that he did, and that it was only his Puck-like spirit which made him in talk make light of what he believed. All up the steps of the Propylæa he was, though amusing, rather profane, and then we came through the central gate, which was yet unfinished, and straight in front of us was the statue. And some jest—I know not what—died on my friend's lips,

and his great grey eyes suddenly became dim with tears at the sight of beauty, and his mouth quivered as he said :

' Mighty Lady Athene, my goddess !'

And with that he knelt down on the rock in front of where she stood, and prayed to the wisdom of God.

He refused to go to the grand lunch after this, and insisted on our remaining up here till it was time to get to the theatre, quoting something that Socrates had said about the cleansing power of beauty ; ' so we will not soil ourselves just yet,' quoth he, ' with the intrigues we should hear about at lunch, but go straight from here to the theatre.' So we bought from a peasant some cheese wrapped up in a vine-leaf, and a bottle of wine, and a loaf of bread and some grapes, and then went down the rock to the theatre. And still that divine vision had possession of Alcibiades, for he paid no attention to the greetings of his friends, and bade them be silent. And soon the actors were come, and the watchman went up to the tower, and looked east, and saw the beacons leap across the land, to show that the ten-year siege was over, and that Troy had fallen. Then slowly began to be unfolded the tale of the stupendous tragedy. Home came Agamemnon, with his captive, the Princess Cassandra, riding behind him in his chariot of triumph. Clytemnestra, his wife, met him at the palace door, and with feigned obeisance and lying words of love welcomed him in, leaving Cassandra outside. Then there descended on the Princess the spirit of prophecy, and in wild words

she shrieked out the doom that was coming. Quickly it came : from within we heard the death-cry of the King, and the palace doors swung open, and out came the Queen, fondling the axe with which she had slain him. . . . The doom of the gods was accomplished.

Then afterwards we went round to the green-room, and found Æschylus there, and Alcibiades, in his impulsive way—I tell him he has the feelings of a woman—must kneel and kiss the hand that wrote this wonderful play. Socrates was there, too, putting absurd questions to everybody about the difference between the muse of tragedy and the muse of comedy, as if anybody cared, so long as Æschylus wrote plays like that ! However, he got Plato to listen to him, and soon made him contradict himself, which is what Socrates chiefly cares about. Pericles came in, too, with Aspasia, to whom he kindly introduced me. Certainly she is extraordinarily beautiful, and has great wit. But she called attention to her physical charms too much, which is silly, since they are quite capable of calling attention to themselves.

Afterwards, since only Alcibiades and I had seen the wonderful statue, we all strolled up to the Acropolis again to look at it and the sunset. Socrates came, too, and after we had examined and admired the bronze goddess again, we went and sat on the steps of the temple of Athene. He tried his usual game of asking us questions till we contradicted ourselves, but before long all of us refused to answer him any more, saying that we were aware that we

were totally ignorant of everything, and that there was no longer any need for him to prove it to us. And then—exactly how it arose I don't know, but I think it was from the questions and answers that had already passed—he began to weave us the most wonderful fable, showing us how all that we thought beautiful here on earth was but the reflection, the pale copy, of the beauty which was eternal. Round the outer rim of the earth and the stars, he said, ran the living stream of a great river, which, indeed, was heaven, and everything that we thought beautiful here had its archetype there, and all day and all night the gods drove round and round on this river of beauty in their chariots. It was our business, then, here on earth, to look for beauty everywhere, and never falter in the quest of it, for so we prepared ourselves for the sight of that of which these things were but the shadow, so that the greater would be the initiation which would be ours after death. More especially we must seek for the beauty of spiritual things, which was the real beauty, and so order our bodies, our words, and actions, that they were all in tune with it, with the beauty of prudence, and temperance, and kindness, and wisdom, for it was of these that heaven itself and the living stream was composed, and these shone from the eyes of the immortal gods.

'So there is my prayer,' said he, rising and stretching out his hands to the great statue, while we all rose with him. 'O Athene, give me inward beauty of soul, and let the inward and the outward man be at one.'

So the sun set, but on the violet crown of Athens —the hills there, Hymettus, Pentelicus, and Parnes —the light still lingered, and shone like the river of beauty Socrates had told us about, till it faded also from the tops, and above the deep night was starry-kirtled.

* * * * *

Helen is the most delightful person in the world to tell stories to. However lamely you tell them, she is absorbed in them, and never asks about the weak points, as other children do. She might, for instance, have asked if I was correct about my dates; did the 'Agamemnon' come out in the year that the 'Promachos' was made? Instead——

'And who was I?' she asked. 'Don't tell me I was Aspasia, because I don't like what you told me about her.'

'No; you were not Aspasia,' I said rather hurriedly; 'and I rather think you had had your turn in Greece at some other time. I didn't know you then, except, perhaps, in the myths, for I am not sure that you were not Electra.'

'Was she nice?' asked Helen.

'She was very nice to Orestes.'

'Oh, don't! Who was Orestes? What a nice name!'

'You were his sister. That's all about mythology just now.'

The plain quivered under the sunlit haze of blue. To the south the dim sea was in tone like two skies

poured together, and the isles of Greece floated in it like swimmers asleep. Below, to the left, lay the theatre where I had seen the 'Agamemnon,' empty, but ready as if the play was just going to begin. Who knew what ghosts of those supreme actors were there, what audience of the bright-eyed Greeks followed the drama? And above us stood the presiding genius of Athens, the beautiful house built for the virgin who sprang from the brain of God. A little more, and it would be her birthday again, and we should hear the sound of horse-hoofs coming up the hill, and see the procession of the Athenian youths, and the men with the bulls for sacrifice, and the wine-carriers, and the incense-bearer, and the priests of the great goddess. Another company would be there, too—the hierarchy of Olympus—come down on Athene's birthday to visit her in her beautiful home. With Zeus would be the mother of the gods; and Aphrodite would be there, the spirit of love that renews the earth; and Apollo, who makes it bright with sunshine; and Demeter, the mother of the cornfields; and Persephone, radiant, and returned from the gate of death; and Hermes, the swift messenger whose feet were winged; and Iris, who was rainbow, the sign of the beneficent seasons.

And . . . though we saw them not, there was not one missing. Love was here, and below were the ripening cornfields, on which the sun shone; and beyond was the realm of Poseidon, and a squall of spring rain, that passed like a curtain in front of Hymettus, showed us Iris.

Then it was time to go down townwards again, for the morning was passed ; but Helen paused at the doorway at the gate of the Acropolis, and looked towards the temple.

'Best of all, I like Socrates' prayer,' she said ; 'and I must say it to myself.'

Spring had been rather late this year, and a week ago, when we drove out to the foot of Pentelicus, to have a country ramble, the rubbish of last year's autumn was still in evidence. Then the spring began to stir, and two days ago, when we had gone out again, all the anemones except one kind were in full flower. They are heralds, those mauve and violet and pink and white chalices of blossom, to tell us that the great procession of Primavera has begun. But last of all come the trumpeters, the scarlet anemones, and if the sun has been warm, and no north wind has delayed the procession, they blow their blasts over the land just two days after the heralds have appeared. So to-day after lunch we went out to hear the trumpeters ; to-morrow we shall see Primavera herself.

Spring herself, the goddess Primavera, was very near to-day, for on thicket and brake and over the flank of the hill-side her trumpeters were blowing their shrill blasts of scarlet. Two days before the land was sober-coloured ; now, wherever you looked, the wonderful anemone, last to flower, stood high with full-blown petals. The movement and stir of the new life was hurrying to its climax. To-morrow, instead of the myriad buds of the cistus

and the pale stalks of orchid, the flowers would be unfurled at the final touch of the spring, at the advent of the goddess herself. To-day a myriad folded bells hung from the great bushes of southern heath, like stars still cloaked in mist ; to-morrow, with one night more of warm wind and a morning of sun, they would blaze and peal together ; for it is thus in this wonderful Southern land that spring comes : a few heralds go before, and then the army of trumpeters. After this, She crosses the plain with the ardour of hot blood, so that all flowers blossom together, and every bud and beast goes suddenly a-mating. Here there is none of our limitative February, our pinched hopes of March ; all is quiet till the heralding of the anemones and the trumpets of their scarlet brethren. Then, in full panoply of blossom, Primavera and summer, too, are there together. For a week or two the land is a-flame with flower, and then already the maturing of fruit-tree has begun.

Northerners though we are, both Helen and I claimed some strain of Southern blood in the ecstasy of those days. That for which we wait and watch for patient weeks in the shy approach of spring in England was here done with a flame and a shout. There was no hesitancy or delay ; no weak snowdrop said that winter was coming to an end weeks before spring came, to die before the crocuses endorsed its message. Here all was asleep together till all woke together. Ten days ago there was no hint of spring save in the strong sunshine : the wilderness of winter still spread its icy hands. Then

faster than the melting of the snow on the top of Parnes came the heralds in the wilderness, and spring was there. It was like the winter of Kundry's soul, to whom one morning Gurnemanz said : ' Auf ! Der Winter floh, und Lenz ist da.' And on that day came Parsifal and her redemption, and the ransomed of the Lord returned with joy and singing.

I have no skill to tell of those days : for the past, all that I knew of the history of this wonderful land, and the present, all that love meant, and the future, the dear event that was coming closer, were so inextricably mingled that no coherence is possible. But if you love a place, and are there with your beloved, and know that she will bear a child to you before many weeks are over, you may make a paradise of Clapham Junction, and find the joy of it a thing incommunicable. And how much more difficult a material is the magic of this land to work in—this little Attic plain, peopled with the ghosts of that wonderful age, which are not dead at all, but instinct with life to-day, at this moment when spring has come, so forcibly that even the slow tortoises on the side of Pentelicus hurried breathlessly about, with deep sighs (I assure you) till they found a congenial lady. Then they ran—positively ran—round her in ever-narrowing circles, still sighing. There were grasshoppers, too—green gentlemen and brown ladies. The brown ladies genteelly ran away, but they never ran far. The great hawks sought each other in the sublime sky, and the young men and maidens of Athens as we

drove back were taking discreet walks together into the country. And from the Acropolis the maiden goddess, who is the Wisdom of God, looked down, and was well pleased.

For, thank Heaven! the Wisdom of God is no prude. To all has it given a soul, and to all souls is desire of some sort given—to one the perfection of form, to another the perfection of wit, to another the perfection of colour, to another the perfection of truth. For each there is a way; each has got to follow it; and for many there are various ways, and these many must follow them all. If a thing is lovely and of good report, we all have to hunt it home. It is no excuse to say you have no time, for you have all the time there is. Search, search: there is the Way everywhere.

Indeed, this is no mystical affair: it is the plainest sense. Whatever happens, God is somehow revealed. But, being blind, we cannot always see the revelation.

* * * * *

To-night, as Helen and I sit on deck of the steamer that takes us back again to Marseilles, we wonder what gives Greece its inalienable magic. We saw the fading of its shores in the dusk, and though the phosphorescence of the sea was a thing to marvel at, it was no longer the phosphorescence of Greek waters. That little fig-leaf-fingered land has sentiment somehow in its soil; it cannot fail to move anybody. Its history since the Great Age—it is no use to deny it—has been tawdry beyond de-

scription. It yielded to the Romans, it scarcely resisted the Albanians ; and though some flickering spirit of its old grandeur flamed again when its people rose against the Turkish rule in the early part of last century, what are we to say of the spirit of the people when, twelve years ago, they again fought their ancient and ancestral enemy ? The Turks strolled slowly southwards from the North of Thessaly, and only the intervention of the Powers prevented Greece again becoming a Turkish province. The Hellenic battle-cry went shrilly up to Heaven, but the Hellenic army trotted like a flock of sheep before the foe, until the Powers said that the war must cease. Only the year before there had been revival of the Olympic games, and there had been a race from Marathon to Athens in memory of Pheidippides, who bore the news of that stupendous victory, and died as he reached Athens, saying, ' Greece has conquered the Persians.' A Greek won that peaceful race from Marathon ; the same Greek won the peaceful race home, and arrived back in Attica in the very van and forefront of the retreating army. The ' host of hares ' was the Turkish name for the foes they never had occasion to meet, who started from their fortresses like hares from their forms, and galloped quietly away. Meantime the Greek fleet cruised in the Adriatic, and sank a fishing-boat. When the war was over, they came home with the spoils of their victory—a hat, a fish, a net. Perhaps it is best to say that there was no war at all : the Turkish armies made peaceful manœuvres over Thessaly, until they

came to Volo. Then the Powers of Europe said: 'We think your manœuvres have extended far enough: kindly go home.'

Yet, somehow, the tragic futility of all this does not really touch Greece or the sentiment that the lovers of the lovely land feel for it. Supposing a Greek army, or a regiment of it, had met the Turk, and died in the cause of patriotism, that could not have added to the compelling charm of Greece, and so the fact that none of these patriotic events happened does not diminish it. In Greece, whatever may be done or left undone, you are in the country where once beauty shot up like the aloe-flower, so that all else is inconsiderable beside that, since whatever the world has achieved afterwards, whether in painting, or sculpture, or drama, or poetry, or in that eagerness of life which is the true romance of existence, is measured, if only it be fine enough, by the standard set then. That is the haunting, imperishable charm of this country, and, missing that, even the phosphorescence of waters by night, divided by the swift keel of the lonely ship, was for a time a soulless firework.

The magic of it—the magic of it!

Thereafter we staggered across the Adriatic, over the ridge and furrow of a grey and unquiet sea, till we found quiet below the heel of Italy. Soon to the south-west the horizon lay in skeins of smoke, and it was not for hours afterward that the cone of Etna, uprearing itself, showed whence the trouble came. Narrower grew the straits, till we passed out

beside Messina, and for the pillar of smoke which Etna had raised all day we sighted Stromboli, a pillar of fire by night. Next morning we were in the narrows between Corsica and Sardinia, and saw the little villages, tiny and toy-like, in the island, whence sprang the brain that was to light all Europe with the devouring flame of its burning. If the dead return, I think it is not in Elba or St. Helena, nor even in the pomp of Paris, nor on the battle-field, that we must guess that Napoleon wanders. He sees the impotence of his destructive and untiring genius. The lines of his new map of Europe have been gently defaced again by time, and he sits quiet enough by the little house, where still the descendants of his old nurse dwell, and sees the innocent campaigning of her grandchildren in their childish games. And when the time comes for unflinching justice to be done to that unflinching spirit, who spared none, nor had pity, so long as by any sacrifice the realization of his ruthless imaginings came true, will not the spirit of his old nurse stand advocate, and remind Justice that, even in the midst of his gigantic schemes, he remembered her who had given him suck, and provided for her maintenance? Somewhere in that iron soul was the soft touch of childish days: he was kind who was so terrible, and that pen so unfacile and so bungling that he hated to write at all put a little paragraph of scarcely decipherable words to his will that showed (what would otherwise have been incredible) how a certain gentleness of heart underlay the iron.

Though all these sights—the chimney of Etna, the furnace of Stromboli, the island of Napoleon—were but milestones, passed before, to show us now how far we were travelling from the magic land, yet each brought us nearer in time and space to the magic of home, and of the day, yet unnamed, which must already, like some peak of an unknown range, be beginning to rear itself up in the foreground of the future.

Then, as the magnet of Greece grew more remote, the magnet of home gained potentiality, until there was no question which was the stronger. We had intended—that is to say, more than half intended—to stay a day or two in Paris; instead, we fled through Paris as if it had been a spot plague-ridden, meaning to pass the night in London. But even as we scurried from Gare de Lyon to Gare du Nord, so, too, we scurried from Victoria to Waterloo, with intention now fully declared to get down to the dear home without pause. As far as I remember, we sustained life on thick brown tea and a Sahara of currant-cake; but at the end there was the snorting motor waiting at the station, and a mile of sleeping streets, cheered by the vision of Mr. Holmes going somewhere in a neat Inverness cape and buttoned boots, a mile of spring-scented country road, and then the little house, discreet behind its shrubbery, where was the rose-garden, among other things, and among other things the nursery.

The night was very warm, and lit by the full moon of April, so, after we had dined, and run like two children from room to room in the house. first to

greet all the precious things of home, with Fifi, like an animated corkscrew, performing prodigies of circular locomotion round us, we found that there was still a large part of home to greet, and so went out into the garden, to see what April had brought forth there. No sudden riot or conflagration of leaf and flower, like that which we had seen blaze over the lower slopes of Pentelicus, was there, but April day by day had done his gentle work, so that where we had left a bed still winter-naked it was now mapped out into the claims of the plants. To-morrow there would be disputes to be settled, for the day-lily had pegged out more than her share, and between her and the iris a delphinium would be crowded out of existence. But every plant—such is our rule—may claim all the ground it can get until the end of April ; then come round the judges of the court of appeal, and if any plant distinctly says, ' I have not room to grow, because of these encroachers,' his appeal, if he promises at all well, is usually upheld, and the encroacher is shorn of his unreasonable encroachments. Even by the moonlight it was quite certain that the court of appeal had a heavy day in front of it : there were lawsuits regarding land to settle, which would require most careful adjustment, for the court hates depriving a rightful possessor of that which his vigour has appropriated. On the other hand, the slender aristocracy of the bed (for the aristocrat grows upwards rather than sideways) must not be elbowed out of existence. One plant only is allowed to do exactly what it pleases and

when it pleases—the pansy, which is 'for thoughts' that are always sweet, and so may roam unchecked and welcome, for who would set limits to the wanderings of so kindly and humble a soul? It but touches the ground, too (to be absolutely honest, I must confess that this has something to do with the liberties we give it), as a moth still hovering and on the wing draws from the flower the sustenance it needs. It does not, so to speak, sit down to make a square meal, or burrow with searching roots deep into the earth, and drain it of all its treasure, but it is ever on the move, like some bright-eyed beggar-girl, to whom none but the churlish would grudge the wayside halfpenny. She will not linger and settle and sponge on your bounty, but be off again elsewhere next moment, just turning to you a smiling face, and whispering a murmured thanks in the bright language of flowers. So she is privileged to wander even in the sacred territory of the roses, where I hope she has already wandered wide. There, however, we did not penetrate to-night, for it and the meadow we kept for the morrow. But on the top margin of the field against the sky I saw shapes that were unmistakable. To-morrow our hearts will go dancing with the daffodils.

But to-night we are content with the thoughts that the pansies have given us, and can even forgive Milton for speaking of them as 'freaked with jet.' Freaked with jet!—when Ophelia had said that they were 'for thoughts'! But, then, Milton speaks of the 'well-attired woodbine,' which is almost as bad. Imagine looking at pansies, and

finding it incumbent on one to say: 'I perceive they are freaked with jet'! But, as one who had the highest appreciation of Milton remarked, to appreciate Milton is the reward of consummate scholarship, which was certainly a very pleasant reflection for himself, and perhaps if I were a better scholar I should think with appreciation of the pansy 'freaked with jet.' As it is, I merely conclude that Milton was flower-blind—a sad affliction.

Helen is absolutely ultra-Japanese in her observance of the flower-festivals, of which she marks some dozen of red-letter days in the year. They cannot, of course, be celebrated on any fixed day, since, owing to the vagaries of climate, there might not be a single lily to be seen, for instance, this year on the actual day which was Lily-day a year ago. She waits instead, like the Japanese, until the particular flower is in the zenith of its blossoming, and then proclaims the festival. Other flowers, naturally, sometimes are at their best on the red-letter day of another, but this, as she observes, is canonically correct, since St. Simon and St. Jude, and St. Philip and St. James, are celebrated together. I was not, therefore, the least surprised next morning, when, after a short excursion to the garden, she came into breakfast, saying:

'It is Daffodil-day, and the day of its sisters of the spring.'

'But we had the sisters of the spring in Greece,' said I.

'Yes; that is the advantage of going to Greece:

the Greek calendar is different to ours. We had Easter Day before we started, and another Easter Day when we got there. Besides, it was Anemone-day, and the day of its sisters of the spring. The anemone's sisters were not the same as the daffodil's.'

This was convincing (even if I needed conviction, which I did not), and Daffodil-day it was.

After the early heats of February the year had had a long set-back in March, and though April was nearly over, I doubt whether there had been any more gorgeous decoration in our absence than that which we found waiting this morning in the church of the daffodils and its sisters of the spring. It was not in vain that we had dug and delved last autumn with such strenuous patience, for that half-acre of field beside the rose-garden was a thing to make the blind see. A rainbow of blossom lay over it all: the early tulips had opened their great chalices of gold and damask; the blue mist of forget-me-nots seemed as if a piece of the sky had fallen, and lay mutely under the trees; brown-speckled fritillaries crouched shyly in the grass, and their white-belled sister nestled beside them; narcissus was there, all yellow, and narcissus with the eye of the pheasant; primroses still lingered, waiting for Helen's proclamation to take part in the festival; while some bluebells had hurried to be here in time; crocuses in the grass were like the dancing of the sun on green waters, or purple as the deep-sea caves; the anemones, greedy for more festivals, had hurried overland from Greece to be here before us;

and clumps of iris were like banners carried in procession. These were the sisters of the spring. It was their day ; but first it was Daffodil-day. Slender and single, tall and yellow, it was as if through the web of them, the golden net that they had laid over the field, that you perceived their sisters. And the sun shone on them, and the great blue sky was over them, and the warm wind made them dance together.

After a long time, Helen spoke.

'Oh, oh !' she said.

That about expressed it.

'My heart with pleasure fills,' she added.

MAY

MAY

It always seems to me a matter for wonder why the astronomers, or Julius Cæsar, or whoever it was who took the trouble to divide time up into months and years, should have made the day of the New Year come in the middle of winter. Probably it has got something to do with the solar eclipse, or the lunar theory, or movements and motions quite unintelligible to the ordinary mind, which would easily have seen the point of beginning the New Year in spring—for instance, on May-day—when the season is clearly suitable for beginning again. But to make a fresh start by candlelight in a fog on the first of January implies a more vivid effort of the imagination and a sterner resolve of the spirit than most of us are able to manage. You might as well try to make up for misspent years by selecting Blackfriars or Baker Street Station as a place to start afresh in.

Personally, though I think the 1st of May would be a quite reasonable occasion on which to begin a New Year, I should prefer a rather later date, when summer is more certain, and it was for this reason that when I formed this (I hope) harmless little project of putting down the quiet happenings of

a year of life, I began in June. Month by month I kept this diary, and you will see when you come to the end of this month of May that my plan was endorsed by what happened then, and that New Year must, in the future, always begin for Helen and me on the first of June.

Even with the early days of May summer descended on us, and Mr. Holmes' Panama hat and a neat new suit of yellowish flannel made their due appearance to confirm the fact. Soon, if this goes on, he will be handing ices instead of buns at tea-parties, and I have often seen him lately on the ladies' links playing golf in his little buttoned boots. He came to call yesterday, and told me of Charlotte's engagement, and announced the fact that my Archdeacon (I call him mine because of what happened at that dreadful Sunday-school) was giving a garden-party on the 11th, and the wife of the younger son of our Baronet had not been invited. The fact of the garden-party on the 11th was not new to us, because We Had Been Invited. Oh, revenge is sweet, and we gloated over the discomfiture of the foe. Her mother had been a governess, too. That was a new fact that Mr. Holmes had gathered in the last half-year—just a governess, and not in a noble family even, but in the employment of a retired tradesman. That accounted for the fact that her daughter spoke French so well; no wonder, since the mother had to teach it. Her knowledge of that language, scraps of which she constantly introduced into her conver-

sation, had always puzzled Mr. Holmes; now he knew how it had been acquired. Indeed, she had come rightly by it, poor thing! We none of us grudged it her. And it was no wonder now to Mr. Holmes that she looked so thin; probably she had never had enough to eat when she was a child, and that indescribable air of commonness about her was perfectly accounted for. Indeed, Mr. Holmes became so sardonic that you would have thought that his family was one (as I dare say it is) compared to which the Plantagenets were parvenus; and Helen changed the subject, which I thought was a pity, as I wanted to hear ever so much more about the lady's obscure origin.

We chatted very pleasantly for a long time, and learned all that the *Morning Post* had said in little paragraphs during the past week, and all that the Close and the County (I recommend that expression) and the Military were doing here. We were going to be very gay indeed; there was already an absolute clash of entertainments during a week of cricket next month, so that the Mayor was forced to give a luncheon-party one day instead of a mere tea, which he would probably not like at all, since if ever there was a Mayor who collected candle-ends, this was the one. Did I remember that which was called champagne at the famous lunch which has already been spoken of?

In fact, Mr. Holmes shook his head over the general trend of affairs, and spoke quite bitterly about the wave of Radicalism which was passing over the country. The County Club, so he said,

which had always prided itself on being a little exclusive, was tainted with commonness now, and had positively disgraced itself at the last election by letting in those three new members. They were nobodies—local nobodies—one the son of a doctor, another the father of a doctor ; the third nobody at all. And—would I believe it ?—there had been a veterinary surgeon up for election as well. Luckily, the club had pulled itself together over him, and given him a smart shower of black-balls. No doubt the club was in want of funds, but why, then, have built a new billiard-room ? How much better to poke the butt-end of our cues into the chimney-piece, as we had always done when playing from over the left-hand middle pocket, than purchase increased cue-room at the sacrifice of our standing as a County Club ? If we did not draw the line somewhere, where were we to draw the line ? That was unanswerable. We all said what is written, 'Tut !' and looked very proud. Helen, I consider, looked prouder than Mr. Holmes, but she disagrees with me, having seen her own face in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. True, she had not the natural advantage that Mr. Holmes's aquiline nose conferred upon him, but the assumed curl of her lip was superb : she looked like a Duchess in her own right.

How slowly these beautiful days of May passed, for when one is very happy and very expectant, time seems to stop. Exactly the opposite happens when one is spending days that are full of pleasures, and

living entirely in the moment, for then hours and days pass on unregarded, so that it is Saturday again before you know the week has really begun. But happiness—I but bungle with words over a thing that is obvious to everybody who knows the difference between happiness and pleasure—is a thing quite detached from the present moment, just as the sunlight which floods these downs is not *of* them. Happiness ever broods on the wing, and swings high above the things of the earth, like some poised eagle, or like the sun itself. It illuminates what it looks on, turning dew to diamond, and striking sapphires into the heart of what has been a grey sea, but it is independent of material concerns ; and were the world to be withdrawn and extinguished, it would shine still. True, it shines on the dewdrop and turns it into wondrous prismatic colours, and thus the common surface of life is always iridescent when we are happy. But happiness—that golden, high-swung sun—does not, I think, particularly regard the jewels he makes out of common things : his own bright shining, perhaps, weaves a golden haze between him and what he shines upon.

It was somehow thus, I think, that things were with us during that first fortnight of May. Below the golden haze were these entrancing facts which I have just recorded about the Archdeacon's party, the frightful disclosures concerning the mother of the wife of the younger son of the Baronet, and the growing plebeianism of the County Club ; but

neither Helen nor I could focus our attention on them; for though, as I have said, time went so slowly, yet there was not time enough to regard them: they belonged to a different plane to that on which we were living. We could penetrate down into it and giggle, but then our attention wandered, and before we knew it, we had swum up again like bubbles through water to the sunlit surface.

There took place, in fact, a revision in our list of joyful and dreadful affairs. No one could appreciate the humour of Mr. Holmes more than Helen did, but, as I have said, she could not attend to him now. Nor could she attend to the perfectly hideous fact that the greater part of the ceiling in the dining-room in Sloane Street had fallen, and that our tenants had (quite reasonably) demanded to be released from their tenancy, of which there was still six weeks to run, since the house was uninhabitable. Nor do I think she would have cared if the ceiling had smothered them as they sat at dinner. And the dreadful earthquake in China failed to move her, and so did the church crisis in France. But for certain other things she cared more than ever, though you would have said they were little enough. All the growth of the spring-time made her eyes brighten and ever grow dim again, and she would dream over the tiny buds of the rose-garden with smiles that were sped to her mouth from the inmost spring of happiness. She spread fat Heliogabalian feasts for the birds, since they wanted nourishment now that they were so busy over their nests, and many dyspeptic bachelors

and spinsters, I expect, reeled daily from their table laid on the lawn to sleep off the results of their excess. She loved the sun, too, more than she had ever loved it, and the shade also, and day and night, and all the firm, great forces of the world.

Not less, too, did she love the little things of little rooms, and now we never sat in the drawing-room, with its Reynolds' prints, but went always to the nursery, with its rocking-horse and its Noah's ark, and its lead soldiers, and its play-table. But when there—when playing these silly games of soldiers, which Helen had been wont to play as if eternal salvation depended on the nice adjustment of a small tin cannon, which, when you pulled a string, shot a pea—she had a change of mood most disconcerting at first. Now and again she shot down my Generalissimo, posted, as he should be, out of possibility of attack almost, in the very rear of my army, by some inconceivable ricochet which would a few weeks ago have filled her mouth with laughter. But now, when these unspeakable flukes occurred, and she upset the heaviest soldiers in my brigade, instead of being delighted, she was sorry, and apologized. To injury, which was bad enough, she added insult, which was worse, and said : ' I am afraid I must win now.'

There is another curious thing (Helen looks over my shoulder as I write, and agrees) that, though she still loves to play soldiers, she wants me to win. Consider it : whoever before wanted to play a game (and the more childish the game, the less

worth while you would have thought to play it), if he did not care about winning? Besides, it is so exceedingly unlike her—she is looking over my shoulder no more—not to play any game as if life and death depended on it. But now she applauds my skill and my luck, and apologizes for her own.

And then, when the game is over, and the Duke of Wellington on one side and Julius Cæsar on the other lie dead, she still sits on the ground beside the low play-table, and looks round the room with wandering, happy eyes. There are the playthings I have told you of—the Noah's ark, the rocking-horse, the great dolls'-house, the front of which, windows and door and all, is unfastened by a neat latch in the wall of the second story, and swings open altogether, so that you must be careful not to unlatch it early in the morning or late at night, else you would see all the ladies and gentlemen at their toilet in an embarrassing state of undress. I found Helen the other morning playing at dolls all by herself. She had laid a banquet in the dining-room, and had arranged the ladies and gentlemen on the stairs, so that one could see at once that they were going down to dinner. From their attitudes, and a tendency to lean against each other or the wall, you might have thought that they were trying to get upstairs after the banquet. But that, Helen told me, was foolish, since their faces were all turned in the direction of downstairs. The answer was that they had indulged even more freely than I had supposed, and were trying to get upstairs backwards.

Yes ; we did all these extremely childish things, and so far from being ashamed of them, I set them all down here for you to laugh at if you like, or merely to be bored with. Things like these—playing at soldiers or at dolls—retained their interest, just as did the spirit of the blossoming summer, when Mr. Holmes's discoveries or the fall of the ceiling in Sloane Street lacked the calibre to interest us. And, if you come to think of it, though I thought an explanation would be difficult, nothing in the world could be more simple. Things about children, and birth, and growth were clearly the only affairs that could concern us. One morning, I remember, it was found that the foundations of the cathedral were in a dreadful state, and that it would probably fall down. I told Helen this as she was engaged on preparing a Gargantuan breakfast for the birds. She only said :

' Oh, what a pity !'

That was all she cared for the historic Norman pile, with all kinds of Kings and Queens buried inside it !

There is nothing more to be recorded of this month, since the only things that seemed to us to have any real importance were just the childishnesses of which I have already given you such amplitude of specimens, until the morning of the last day of May.

The rule of the house was that there was no rule of any sort as regards breakfast. Anybody who came into the dining-room at most hours of the

morning would find the breakfast perennials (bread, butter, sugar, milk, the morning paper and marmalade) on the table, and would, on ringing a bell, be given the annuals—*i.e.*, fresh tea and a hot dish. Similarly, anybody who did not come into the dining-room was supposed to be breakfasting either elsewhere or not at all. So on this last morning of May, on coming down, I rang the bell, and read the paper till bacon came. An hour before I had just looked into Helen's room, and seen that she was still asleep.

The bacon was rather long coming that morning—I try to reconstruct the day exactly as it happened—and I had already skimmed the news, and found there was not any, and in default of it was reading a superb account of the visit of a member of the Royal Family to Naples, who in the afternoon had 'honoured' (so said the loyal press) the volcano of Vesuvius with a visit. How gratifying for the immortal principle of fire! One hoped it would not become swollen in the head. This fortunate volcano, whose cone had been blessed——

At the moment I heard a step outside. It was not from the kitchen: it was coming from upstairs, and it came very quickly. Then, instantaneously, terror seized me, for time and place were no longer now and here, but it was the evening when I heard my name called in the garden, and thereafter heard Legs running downstairs. And quickly as the steps came, they seemed to me to go on for ever; yet I had only just time to get up, when there came a

fumbling hand on the door, and Helen's maid came in.

'If you please, sir, would you send at once,' she began. 'The nurse——'

There were quicker ways than sending, and next minute I was flying up the road on my bicycle. My mind, as I think must always happen with any mind in such moments, seemed curiously inactive, though somewhere there was inside me a little bit of tissue, so to speak, that agonized, and hoped, and prayed. But for the most I only thought of one thing—that once before I had gone on just the same errand, from this same house, up the same road, to fetch the doctor for her, my dearest friend. O Margery! go quickly to God and tell Him. . . . We want Him.

And then the tissue that agonized and prayed sank out of sight again, and I was just speeding up the sunny, dusty road, on which, as I got nearer the town, the traffic became denser. Once a butcher's cart pulled suddenly out into the middle of the road in front of me, and I thought collision was inevitable, except that I knew that it was not possible that I should be stopped when going on such an errand as this, and several times I passed people I knew, yet, though I knew them, their faces were meaningless: they conveyed names, but nothing whatever more. And then—whether very soon or countless ages later, I had no idea—I was at the doctor's door in the quiet, decorous street, which also was meaningless—neither strange nor familiar, but purely without significance. Everything I saw

was detached; nothing had any relation to life, except just one thing: his dog-cart, which was at the door, concerned me.

He had not yet started on his rounds, and it was not five minutes before he was ready. He had only to pick up a little bag, into which he put a case of some kind, and something bright, that I turned my eyes from, and a bottle which he wrapped up—it seemed to me very neatly and slowly—which clinked against that which was already in the bag.

Then he turned to me.

'Now, if you take my advice,' he said, 'you won't come back with me, but will go for a ride on this beautiful morning. You will not see your wife, and for the next hour or so it is not possible that I should have anything to tell you. We don't want you in the house: we don't want to be bothered with you.'

He got briskly into his dog-cart, nodded to me over his shoulder, and, instead of driving himself, gave his servant the reins. I know I shouted something after him, telling him, I think, to be careful, and so found myself on the doorstep, looking at a bicycle which was leaning against the pillar of the porch, and was evidently not mine. But, like the dog-cart, it was not meaningless, for it was Helen's, which I must have used by mistake. I must take it back; it was careless of me.

Then his advice occurred to me, but it sounded ridiculous, as senseless as some nursery-rhyme. And at the thought there suddenly started in my head the first two lines of 'Humpty-Dumpty.' I could

not remember the last two lines, but the first went round and round in my brain, keeping time to my pedalling.

Soon after I was home again, only a moment behind him, for he was just getting out when I came to the gate, and I waited till he had gone in, so that he should not know I had failed to follow his advice —at least, I believe that was the reason, but I am not sure.

I went round by the back way into the garden, and sat down in the veranda outside my own room, where Fifi was lying in the sun. But I had to coax her silently indoors, for I could not bear that she should lie there, lest suddenly she should again look out into the garden, and howl at something she saw there. She would not come in at first, and once she pricked her ears at something she saw outside, and I stopped mine, lest I should hear her howl. And all the time 'Humpty-Dumpty'—the first two lines of it—went on and on. It was so terribly lonely, too—just that silly rhyme, and I all alone. If only Legs were here, or anybody—anybody. You see, this was not expected to-day, nor for weeks yet. My mother was coming to stay with us next week, until. . . .

Then I heard the muffled sound of steps in the room just above my head—Helen's room—and at that for a little the babble and confusion of my troubled brain cleared, and 'Humpty-Dumpty' ceased, and I was not afraid of Fifi howling, for there was no room for anything except the thought of Helen, who lay there, and of the life yet unborn.

And I could not help—I could not bear any of it for her. I could not even be with her : birth was as lonely as death.

Outside the garden lay basking in the heat of the early summer, and everywhere the expansion of life, which had seemed to us so wonderful and glorious a thing through all these weeks of May, suddenly became sinister and menacing. What travail may not go to the opening of a single flower, or the maturing of its casket of seeds ? It would all be of a piece with the cruelty and the anguish that runs through life like a scarlet, bleeding thread, beginning, as now, even before birth, and not even ending with death, since those who remain have the wound of that yet to be healed. Right through life goes the scarlet thread, knotted on the farther side at each end, so that it shall not slip. And— 'Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall.' Ah, yes ! I had it all now. 'The King's horses' was what I could not remember. And at that the crowd of trivialities again came between my mind and me.

We had set up the croquet-hoops again only last week, and had argued over the position of that particular corner one by which my ball had rested when last autumn a telegram had been brought me from the house. Helen had said it was square with the corresponding corner ; I knew it was not, and from here it was perfectly easy to see that she had been wrong. I hate an awry disposition of hoops. 'All the King's horses' . . . they really should bring these rhymes up to date ; it ought to be motor-cars instead of horses.

These things passed very slowly through my mind, for it acted as if it was numbed and half-paralyzed, and the croquet-hoop occupied the foreground of it for a considerable time. I had let Fifi out again, and she was racing about the lawn in the attempt to catch swallows, a feat of which she never realized the unreasonableness, and I had left the doors into my room, both from the hall and from here outside, open. And then, with the same rapidity as they had come, all these nonsense things passed away again, for I heard steps on the stairs, and, going in, saw the doctor standing on the landing above, talking in low tones to the nurse. He saw me, made a little movement of his hand as if to detain me, and when he had finished what he had to say to her, came downstairs.

'I will have a word with you,' he said gravely; and we went into my room. I saw him looking at me rather curiously, and was wondering why, when he suddenly seemed to lean up against me. Then I perceived that it was I who was swaying on my feet. He put me in a chair.

'I suppose you have not had breakfast,' he said. 'You are to eat something immediately; I will ring the bell. And now listen. It is going to be difficult, and, I am afraid, dangerous, and it is better that you should know it now.'

And then the dear, kind man just laid his hand on my arm.

'I'm awfully sorry,' he said; 'you can't think how I hate to tell you this. I hope it will be all right; there is nothing yet that forbids me to hope that.

Please God, we shall pull her through, but—well, well.'

He broke off as the door opened, and a servant came in.

'Just bring a tray in here,' he said. 'Tea? Yes, tea, and an egg and a couple of bits of toast. Thank you.'

'Remember, I still hope it will be all right,' he said. 'And even if—well, you are both young still. Now I shall be back here in an hour at the outside.'

'You are not going,' I said. 'You mustn't.'

'Yes, yes. I know what you feel,' he said. 'But there is nothing for me to do here yet, and I have to make arrangements so that I can come back and remain here till all—is satisfactory.'

'You don't stir from this house,' I said.

'Do you think I should go if there was the slightest possibility of your wife needing me?' he said quietly.

'No; I beg your pardon.'

'That's all right. Now when your breakfast comes, eat it, and read a book if you can, or go and garden. I am sure those roses of yours want looking after, and I tell you it's a hard thing for a man in your position, and a thing which we doctors respect, to go and occupy himself. If you can't, you can't, but you might have a try.'

The servant brought in a tray before many minutes, and with it the morning paper. When I had eaten, I took it up and looked at it. There was no news, but the middle page contained an account of a visit

to Vesuvius by an English Prince. He 'honoured' the volcano with a visit. And then I knew that I had seen the paper before. But when? Years and years ago, or this morning?

What the doctor had said to me needed no time or thought for realizing it. I felt as if I had known it all along—known it all my life. But—what happened next, if that all happened long ago? Was the room overhead the chamber of death or the chamber of birth? Next door to it was the nursery, with its Noah's ark and its soldiers and its rocking-horse. Who was going to ride on that? And the dolls'-house, with its tottering inhabitants—who next was to play with those, and open the wall? Oh, Helen, Helen, you and your child, will it be? Or will it be you and I again, but after a long time, hoping once more? Or—dear God, no, not that!

Daffodil-day, and its sisters of the spring! And Rose-day will come next month. Roses . . . heaped for the beloved's bed. Dear God, not that: it does not mean that bed. Indeed—indeed it does not. You have so many souls already in Your house of many mansions. Give us a few more years together, for they are so sweet, and a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday. And we should so like a young thing, one of our own, in the house. But . . . thank You very much for the years that have been so sweet. They have been—they have been. And, please don't let her suffer or be frightened.

Then I went across the lawn and into the rose-garden. Though we had been very industrious

there, I never saw yet the rose-tree on which there is nothing to be done, and for a little my hands made themselves busy. Then quite suddenly it all became impossible, and there was nothing in the world except what the doctor had told me, and floating on the top of that 'Humpty-Dumpty, Humpty-Dumpty.'

So it was within the hour that I got back again to the house, and the doctor had not yet returned. I missed something familiar on the lawn, without at once knowing what it was, and then I saw that the birds' breakfast was not there. That took me to the dining-room, where I found lunch was already laid, and with bread-crumb and little bits of cheese, and cold meat mixed, I made a plateful for them, though, as you know, it was the last day of May, and I suppose it was but pauperism among the thrushes that I encouraged. But Helen all these days had done so. I knew she would not like them to miss their provision.

Soon after—so soon that the news of their belated meal had not yet become public among the birds—the doctor returned. I heard him go upstairs, and after that I crept into the hall, and sat down on the lowest step of the seventeen that led to the landing. Legs used to jump down them in two bounds, taking eight steps first, and then nine, and get up (with a run) in three—two sixes and a five. . . . What am I maundering about? And before very long I must have been sitting higher up the stairs, for I could see out of the window on the staircase. The dog-cart had drawn away from the door into the

shade, and the groom had got down, and was gently stroking the mare's nose. Then he laid his smooth young cheek against it, and she stood quite still, liking it. I expect he is kind to her.

The sun had swung round farther to the west, and it came in through the window. But now I was nearly at the top of the stairs ; there were but three above where I sat. The house was very still ; below me on the ground-floor there had been no step or sign of life, and there was nothing from behind the second door to the left just above me. Then came the sharp tingle of an electric bell. There was only one room from which it could have come.

I tapped very gently, though my heart beat so that I thought it must have been a hammer-noise to those inside. The door opened a chink, and a level, quiet voice said : 'Some hot water, please —very hot.' Perhaps a minute afterwards I tapped again, and a hand took the can of hot water from me.

I went back again, this time to the top step, and still waited. Since I had done something, though it was but the handing of a can of hot water into the room, that nightmare of incoherent thoughts began to clear more completely, and, like some remembered sunlight breaking clouds, and shining with the serene quietude of eventide, Helen—she herself, no intercepted vision, no vision even of remembrance only or anxiousness—shone out. Whatever happened, she was I, and I was she, and the Will of God, whatever It might ordain for us, could not alter that. She and I, I think, have never feared anything when we were together, and surely of all days that life or death

could hold for us, we could never be more together than to-day. So, surely, of all hours this is the one when fear should be farthest from us, for never have we been together like this. Yet, O my God, my God, since Christ was born of a woman, let Him go in there, the second door. . . .

And the next door, You know, is the nursery. . . . No, not the farther one, but the one this side. Yes, yes, of course You know, but You might have forgotten. There's the Noah's ark there, and the dolls'-house, and the lead soldiers. We had hoped. . . .

Red light came in through the window on the stairs—light of sunset. Once more the stinging sound of the electric bell came to me ; once more I took up a can of hot water.

Then it grew dark ; in the hall below the lamp had been lit, and from the window, after the last red of sunset had faded, there came the distant shining of stars, endlessly remote. Then the door opened again, and the nurse came hurrying out, forgetting to close it. From within came the cry of a child.

* * * * *

June 1.—I overstep the bounds of the year, but you may like to know. Quite early this morning I was allowed to go in and look. They were sleeping, both of them—she and he.

Afterwards I went into the nursery.

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